

Over Not Out

The housing and homelessness issues specific to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender asylum seekers



Specialists for over 50 years



Part of

Metropolitan Support Trust

May 2009

Full report

Michael Bell and Cole Hansen
Michael Bell Associates

Foreword

Barbara Roche,
Chair of Metropolitan Support Trust

One of Refugee Support's key objectives is to provide 'quality housing and support services to refugees and asylum seekers that are sensitive to their needs and assists with their settlement and integration.' While we fulfil that objective in a number of different ways, at the heart of our work is a commitment to understand some of the key issues facing refugees and asylum seekers so that we are able to tailor our services, making them appropriate to their individual and collective needs.

In July 2008, the Research and Consultancy Unit at Refugee Support identified a significant research gap on the issues facing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) refugees and asylum seekers. 'Over Not Out' is the first comprehensive study on the housing and homelessness issues facing LGBT asylum seekers. The analysis demonstrates that LGBT asylum seekers face multiple disadvantages because of their status, sexual orientation or gender identity.

The policy recommendations that we have identified are helpful in shaping our own services, in particular; diversity training in this area for all staff as part of their induction and personal development; confidential reporting mechanisms for LGBT asylum seekers who may experience harassment and a commitment to listen to and act upon the feedback our service users provide. We at Refugee Support look forward to working in partnership with other stakeholders as we develop a strategy to progress this work. Together using our knowledge, skills and expertise, we can bring about change to further develop services to support LGBT asylum seekers.

On behalf of Refugee Support I would like to thank everyone for their contributions. I am grateful to all who took part in the research and know that their experiences will contribute a great deal to our understanding of the issues facing LGBT asylum seekers.

I am particularly grateful to Joyce Gould who has kindly supported this research project and sponsored our launch at the House of Lords. I would also extend my thanks to Michael Bell (Practice Director) at Michael Bell Associates and his team of researchers, Iain Easdon and Cole Hanson, including the community researchers: Melissa Gojikian, Yousef Gojikian, Elzbieta Jezowska, Bisi Olonisakin and Brenda Wade for undertaking this research. Ahmad Yousof, volunteer at the RCU has provided invaluable administrative support for this project. The project steering group had a pinnacle role to play in driving this research forward. My sincere thanks goes to Paul Birtill, Charlotte Keeble and Sarah Walker from Refugee Support, Heather Hutchings from Amnesty International, Bob Green from Stonewall Housing and particular thanks goes to Sebastian Rocca and Florence Kizza from the United Kingdom Lesbian and Gay

Immigration Group, who not only sat on the steering group but also provided meeting room facilities and identified research participants who took part in this research.

The full report is available as download only and can be accessed from the Refugee Support website at: www.refugeesupport.org.uk/researchandconsultancy.html

Please refer to the 'glossary of terms' for a comprehensive list of all definitions.

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Additionally we would like to extend many thanks to Baroness Gould for graciously presiding over the launch of this research in the House of Lords.

Most importantly we would like to thank the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender asylum seekers for the time they have given to this research.

This research has been undertaken by a team at Michael Bell Associates comprising:

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Iain Easden
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Community researchers

Melissa Gojikian
Yousef Gojikian
Elzbieta Jezowska
Bisi Olonisakin
Brenda Wade

Background and introduction

1. Background to the research

Refugee Support (RS) / Metropolitan Support Trust (MST) is one of the country's leading providers of housing and support for refugees and asylum seekers. In the Autumn of 2008 the Research and Consultancy Unit (RCU) at RS/MST commissioned Michael Bell Associates to undertake ground breaking research into the housing and homelessness issues specific to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) asylum seekers, with particular reference to those living in and returning to London. A key aim of the RCU is to undertake and commission research that will benefit refugees, asylum seekers and migrant populations. The aims of this research were fourfold:

- to increase knowledge and understanding of the issues and barriers LGBT asylum seekers face with regards to accommodation and homelessness in London;
- to identify potential causal relationships between housing and homelessness and health/well being, personal safety, alcohol and substance misuse;
- to provide evidence to help develop more effective ways of responding to the housing/accommodation needs of LGBT asylum seekers in London; and
- to produce robust policy recommendations.

Report structure

Whilst section one has provided the background information regarding the commissioning of the research and research methodology, section two identifies the key findings of this research project. Section three provides details of the interviewees and most importantly presents the qualitative research in the words of LGBT asylum seekers themselves with analysis of the key themes. Section four provides a stakeholder and service provider perspective. It includes cameos of good practice which could provide the basis for developing policy to meet the needs of LGBT asylum seekers. Section five includes the conclusion and recommendations and section six, lists the glossary of terms. Section seven incorporates the research tools utilised and finally section eight details a literature review and select bibliography.

1.1. Outline methodology

The research was undertaken in three phases:

- **Phase one – Project inception** - the activities included: working with the steering group; a desk-based review of evidence; drafting of the interview schedule and developing the sample frame; and arranging a stakeholder meeting of key community organisations from both the LGBT community and the refugee sector.
- **Phase two** – the second phase of the research focussed on undertaking the fieldwork, including: recruiting and training community researchers drawn from LGBT communities and principal refugee ethnic groups; undertaking 40 face-to-face interviews with LGBT

asylum seekers; and data-inputting and analysis of the interviews based upon the taped and transcribed interviews.

- **Phase three** – this final phase focused on refining the findings and developing recommendations. The key activities included: preparation of a consultative document with key emerging findings; a half day co-operative enquiry workshop for the steering group and key stakeholders to test and refine the findings and develop practice-based recommendations for the future; and further interviews with 19 stakeholders (see 7.3 for details).

A sample frame was developed to assist in the identification of interviewees to reflect LGBT asylum seeker populations (see 7.5). This sample frame included a larger number of gay and bisexual men than lesbians or bisexual women in order to reflect the greater number of men in the overall refugee and asylum seeking population.

The research project culminated in a full report and executive summary. Both documents are downloadable from the Refugee Support website at www.refugeesupport.org.uk/researchandconsultancy.html

In most cases the range of interviewees broadly matched this sample frame. We were unable to identify interviewees for two categories:

- Over 45 year olds – stakeholders felt that this probably reflected the LGBT asylum seeking community, however concerns remain that there may be further exclusion for older LGBT asylum seekers. This was corroborated by some stakeholders who identified that older (45+) LGBT asylum seekers were not generally accessing support services.
- Unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people leaving care – there are almost certainly LGBT young people in these communities and are at greater risk of exclusion or exploitation. This group is subject to a recommendation for further research (see recommendation 30).

Key findings

2. Context

Since the late 1980s the UK has seen a dramatic rise in the number of people seeking asylum from persecution in their own countries. In 1988, there were 4,400 applications for asylum filed in the UK. By 2000 the number of applications had risen to a high point of 80,300. During this period politicians and the media have often manipulated public perceptions of asylum seekers and the issue of 'illegal migrants' and 'bogus asylum seekers' has become central to public debate about immigration and asylum¹.

The increase of spontaneous asylum seekers applying for asylum in country (rather than at the port of entry) has also highlighted the permeability of the nation's borders in an era of securitisation and the global "war on terror". This has been met with public characterisation of the asylum issue as a security threat and there has been a growing acceptance of surveillance, dispersal, detention, and removal as acceptable policy tools for handling the increased number of asylum seekers in the UK.²

In this context, especially with the increased focus on 'bogus asylum seeking', claiming asylum on the basis of one's sexuality or gender identity has become a contentious issue. However the motivations of many LGBT asylum seekers to come to the UK arise from a genuine fear of persecution in their home countries. In today's world consensual homosexual acts remain criminalised in over 80 UN member states. Perhaps more importantly, cultural and customary practices and taboos effectively stigmatise LGBT identity in many other countries and deny LGBT people the right to express themselves and have consensual romantic relationships.

In order to claim asylum on the basis of one's sexuality in the UK the claimant must prove that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender and that it is impossible for them to be 'discreet' about their sexual or gender identity in their home country in order to avoid persecution. This is exceptionally difficult for many LGBT asylum seekers to prove in an objective and documented manner. Their plight is a difficult one given the Government's current stance on LGBT asylum seekers, as identified in the following quote from Home Secretary Jacqui Smith regarding LGBT asylum seekers from Iran: "...the evidence does not show a real risk of discovery of, or adverse

¹ Robinson, V., Andersson, R., & Musterd, S. *Spreading the 'Burden'? A review of policies to disperse asylum seekers and refugees*. Bristol: the Policy Press, 2003. For media and public responses see pp. 10-24 and 104-120.

² See Eurobarometer (1998) p. 23, "...the anxieties expressed by a number of respondents seemed to result not so much from the actual presence of minority groups but from the perception as to the ability of the host society to accommodate them, giving rise to feelings of insecurity."

action against gay and lesbian people who are discreet about their sexual orientation.”³ This is despite claims of gay campaign groups that 4,000 Iranians have been executed because of their sexuality since 1979.

Nonetheless there has been a growing public awareness of the hardships faced by LGBT asylum seekers in the UK and Europe generated by increased media coverage of specific cases of LGBT asylum seekers who have either been deported or are at risk of being deported. In July 2007 demonstrators gathered outside Dover Immigration and Removal Centre to protest against the treatment of LGBT asylum seekers in UKBA detention facilities and to demand an end to deportation to countries where LGBT people face persecution.⁴

In 2008 the Home Secretary announced that she would review the case of a 19-year-old gay Iranian asylum seeker, Mehdi Kazemi, who feared execution were he to be returned to Iran.⁵ Following this, the highly publicised case of “Mr X” has brought further attention to the issue. Mr X is a gay asylum seeker who was deceived by UKBA staff and unlawfully deported from the UK in 2008 and now faces danger in his country of origin (which remains unspecified). In February 2009 High Court Judge Sir George Newman ruled that Mr X’s removal was “manifestly unlawful” and has ordered the Home Secretary to use her “best endeavours” to bring him back to the UK.⁶ This media coverage has come at a time of growing sentiment among some segments of the public that the current treatment of LGBT asylum seekers by the UK asylum system is unacceptable and violates the 1951 UN Refugee Convention.

2.1 Patterns of asylum seeking

This section addresses changing patterns of asylum seeking by numbers and countries of origin. The latest asylum application figures from the Home Office are from 2008. A total of 25,670 asylum applications (excluding dependents) were made in 2008, reflecting a 10% increase from 2007 which saw 23,430 asylum applications. The countries of origin of asylum seekers for Quarter 1 (Q1), 2008 are as follows:

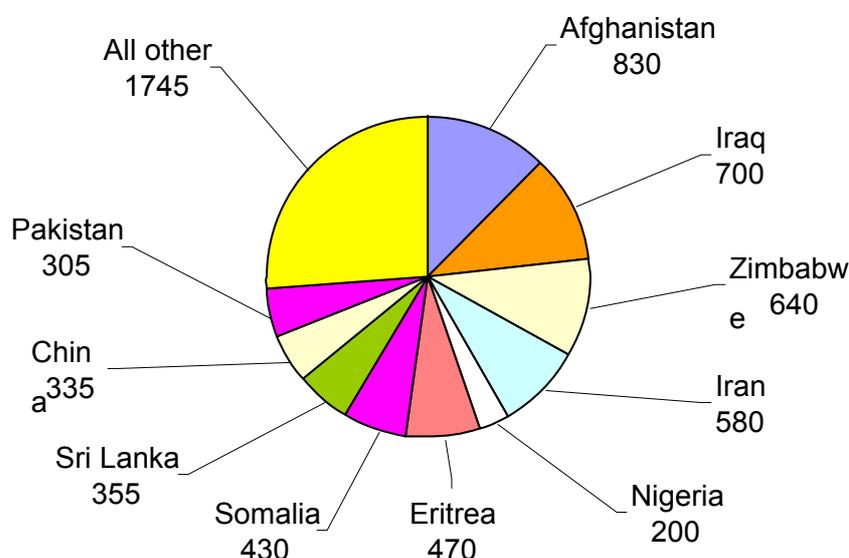
³ *Iran is safe for ‘discreet’ gays, says Jacqui Smith.* Robert Veraik. The Independent, June 23 2008. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/iran-is-safe-for-discreet-gays-says-jacqui-smith-852336.html> (accessed 16 April 2009).

⁴ *Protestors Support Gay Asylum Seekers.* KentNews.co.uk, 11 June 2007. <http://www.kentnews.co.uk/kent-news/Protestors-support-gay-asylum-seekers-newsinkent4052.aspx> (accessed on 06 April 2009).

⁵ *Britain: Reprieve for Gay Iranian Asylum Seeker.* Sarah Lyall, New York Times. 14 March 2008.

⁶ *Deporting Gay Asylum Seeker ‘was unlawful.’* Robert Verkaik, the Independent, 20 February 2009. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/deporting-gay-asylumseeker-was-unlawful-1627052.html> (accessed on 06 April 2009).

Top 10 Nationalities Seeking Asylum (Home Office, 1st quarter 2008)



Asylum applications increased from Q1 2007 to Q1 2008 from nationals of the following countries: Iraq (+122%), Zimbabwe (+97%), Eritrea (+38%), Somalia (+10%), Sri Lanka (+28%), Pakistan (+22%), and Nigeria (+12%). These increases include countries where LGBT people face considerable persecution and it is reasonable to expect that an increase of general asylum applicants from these countries would include an increased number of LGBT applicants.

2.2. Estimating numbers of LGBT asylum seekers

There are many difficulties involved in estimating the number of asylum seekers who are LGBT. The UKBA does not collect or collate data on the sexual orientation of asylum applicants and data collected on gender does not reflect transgender issues. Most social and legal service providers do not collect this information from their service users. This lack of quantitative data means that no accurate statistical analysis about the size and profile of LGBT refugees and asylum seeking populations can be made.⁷

In order to make some crude estimates regarding the number of LGBT asylum seekers in the UK, it may be helpful to use the current government estimates regarding the general LGBT population. The government estimates that five to seven per cent of the general population is lesbian, gay, or bisexual (Women and Equalities Unit, June 2003). If this figure is applied to the number of asylum applicants each year a picture begins to emerge as to how many LGBT asylum seekers come to the UK. In 2008, 25,670 people made asylum claims in the UK. That would indicate approximately 1,284 to 1,797 lesbian, gay, or bisexual asylum seekers. This is likely to

⁷ Anisa De Jong (2003) *ICAR Navigation Guide: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) refugees and asylum seekers*.

be a very conservative estimate.

There are no recognised methods of calculating the size of the transgendered population, however, the report provides a crude methodology in this area and estimates that the numbers of transgendered people arriving each month is 2 -3, or around 20 to 30 per year. These approaches may severely under-estimate the numbers of LGBT asylum seekers arriving in the UK.

The United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) does not gather statistics on sexual orientation at asylum screening interviews and does not collate information on claims for asylum based on sexual orientation or transgender identity. Similarly, whilst we appreciate the constraints on monitoring sexuality in refugee support and refugee community organisations the absence of data may further add to the marginalisation of these communities.

2.3. Treatment of sexuality in countries of origin

This section provides a brief overview of the legality and acceptability of LGBT lifestyles in the top six countries of origin for asylum seekers from the sample group. Please note that whilst male homosexuality is most often subject to criminalisation, there can be severe sanctions imposed by society on lesbians seeking to express their sexuality in many countries. This country information is drawn from the International Gay and Lesbian Association's 2008 world survey of laws prohibiting same sex activity, *State Sponsored Homophobia*.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Homosexual acts are not banned as such, but article 172 of the Penal Code of 1940, as modified in 2006, criminalises 'Offences Against the Moral' and can be used against same-sex contacts.

Iran

The Islamic Penal Code of Iran of 1991 explicitly outlaws male to male sexual activity and female to female sexual activity. Male to male sexual intercourse, described as sodomy, is punishable by death. Female to female sexual activity is punishable by 100 lashes. In either case the accused parties are judged according to Sharia law and the testimony of four men may alone be regarded as proof of guilt.

Iraq

After the American invasion of 2003, Iraq reinstated the Penal Code of 1969 which does not prohibit sexual activities between consenting adults of the same gender. However, with the country under war and without properly functioning law enforcement, there are reports of death squads operating in the country killing homosexuals.

Notably two Shiite militias, the Badr Brigades and the Mahdi Army, have been linked to intimidation, kidnapping, and murder of LGBT people in post-Saddam Iraq.

In October 2005 Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani issued a fatwa stating that male homosexuality and lesbianism were both 'forbidden' and that '[t]he people involved should be killed in the worst, most severe way of killing.'

Jamaica

Articles 76-79 of the Offences Against the Person Act outlaw any sexual activity between men, consensual or otherwise. Anal intercourse is punishable by up to 10 years imprisonment with hard labour. Female to female sexual activity is legal, however anecdotal evidence from this research demonstrates that any form of LGBT identity or lifestyle may face severe discrimination in contemporary Jamaican society.

Nigeria

The Criminal Code Act of the Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990 stipulates that male homosexual sex is a felony offence liable to seven years imprisonment. Sexual activity between consenting female adults is legal. However, several Northern Nigerian states have adopted Islamic Sharia Laws that criminalise sexual activities between persons of the same sex. For men the maximum penalty for such acts is the death penalty, while for women it is whipping and/or imprisonment.

Pakistan

Section 377 of the Penal Code (Act XLV of 1860) stipulates that those guilty of carnal intercourse against the order of nature may be imprisoned for two to ten years. This law effectively criminalises male homosexuality but not female same-sex activity. However social mores and practices effectively prohibit any expression of LGBT identity in Pakistan today, similar to that noted in Jamaica.

The following map from ILGA illustrates the legality and acceptability of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and intersex self-identification and activities internationally.⁸

⁸ The term 'intersex' denotes a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male.

LGTLBI rights in the World

ILGA, the worldwide federation campaigning for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex rights since 1978



May 2008

PERSECUTION:

- death penalty: 7 countries
- imprisonment: 76 countries and 6 entities*

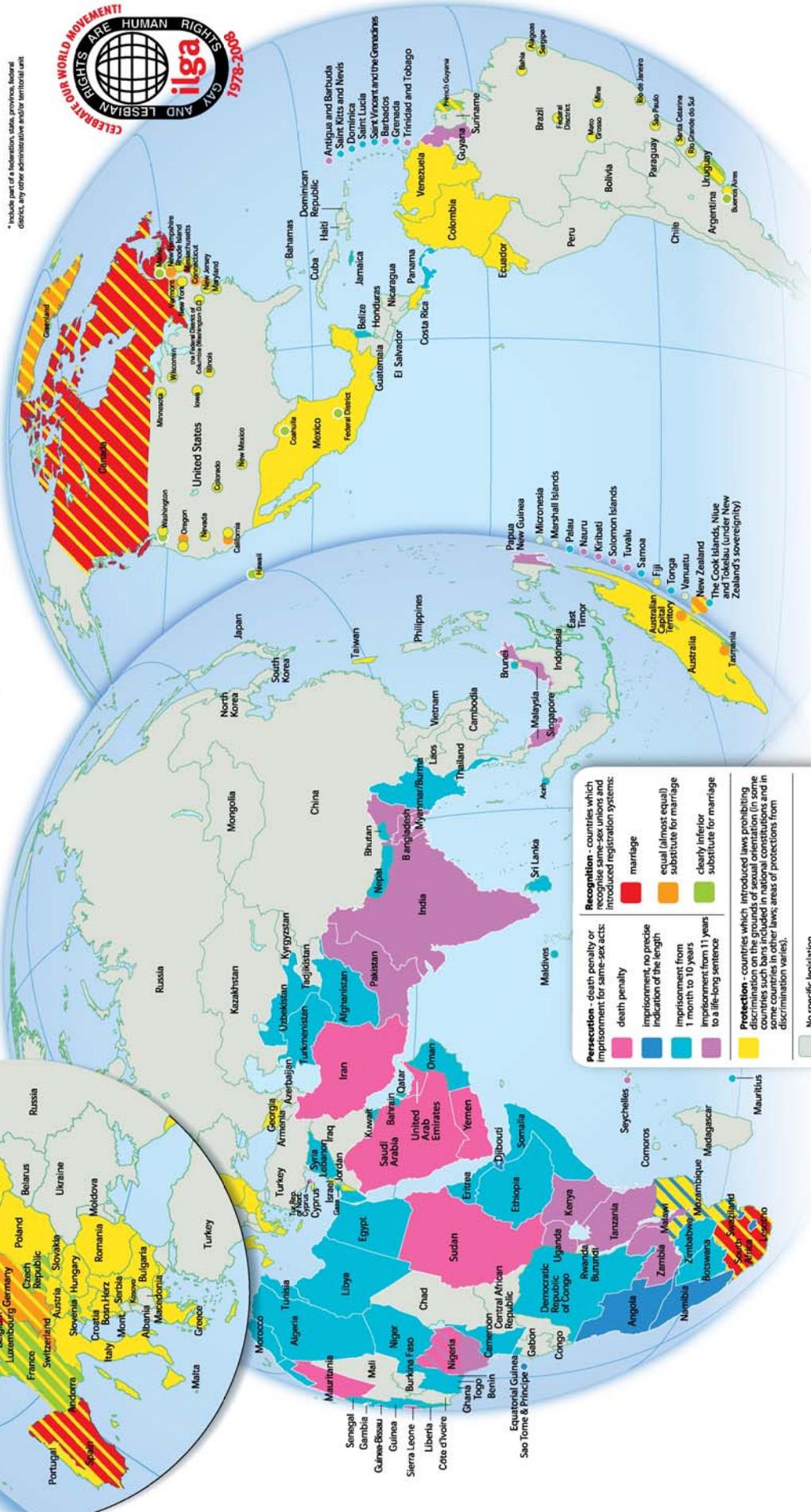
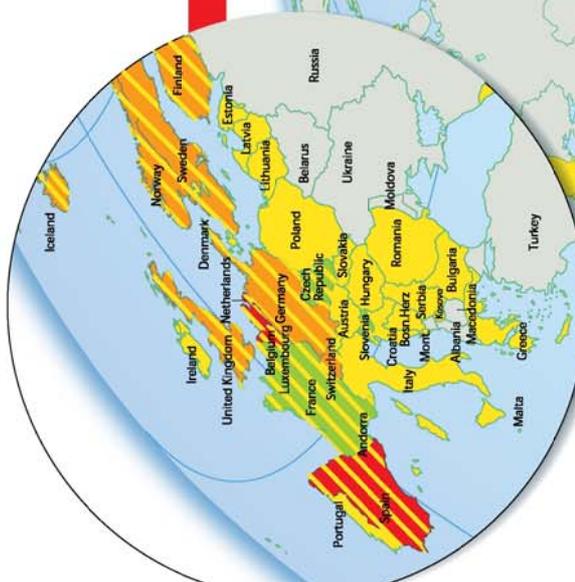
PROTECTION:

- anti-discrimination laws: 50 countries and 33 entities

RECOGNITION:

- recognition and registration for same-sex unions: 19 countries and 14 entities

* includes part of a federation, state, province, federal district, any other administrative and/or territorial unit



Persecution - death penalty or imprisonment for same-sex acts:

- death penalty
- imprisonment, no precise indication of the length
- imprisonment from 1 month to 10 years
- imprisonment from 11 years to a life-long sentence

Recognition - countries which recognise same-sex unions and introduced registration systems:

- marriage
- equal (almost equal) substitute for marriage
- clearly inferior substitute for marriage

Protection - countries which introduced laws prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation (in some countries such as bans included in national constitutions and in other cases laws, areas of protections from discrimination varies).

- No specific legislation

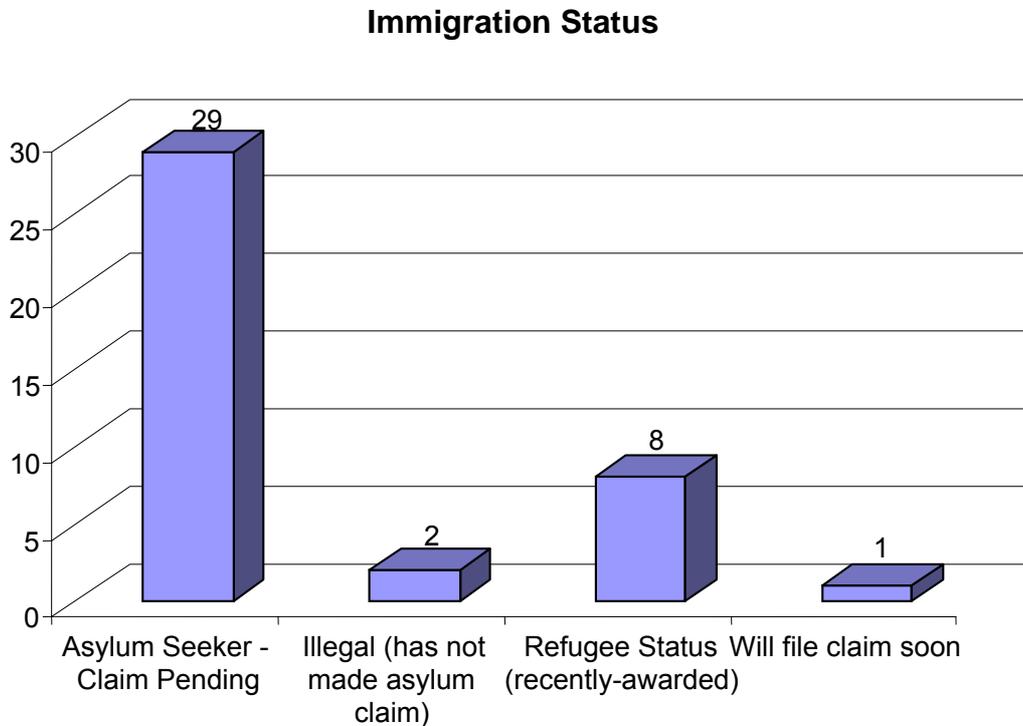
These laws are aimed at lesbians, gay men and bisexuals and at same-sex activities and relationships. At times, they also apply to trans and intersex people. The world map project was coordinated by Joris Lantiers (ILGA Europe) and Stephen Barritt (ILGA). This map was originally designed by Philippe Mauche for the magazine and ILGA, adjustments for ILGA-Europe Newsletter by Silja Popovic. Data represented in this map is based on 'State-Sponsored Homophobia: a world survey of laws prohibiting same sex activity between consenting adults', an ILGA report by Daniel Otsson (available on www.ilga.org in English, Spanish, Portuguese and French).

Map available from: http://www.ilga.org/map/LGBT_rights.jpg

3. In our own words

3.1. Demographic profile

A total of 40 individuals have been interviewed for this research.



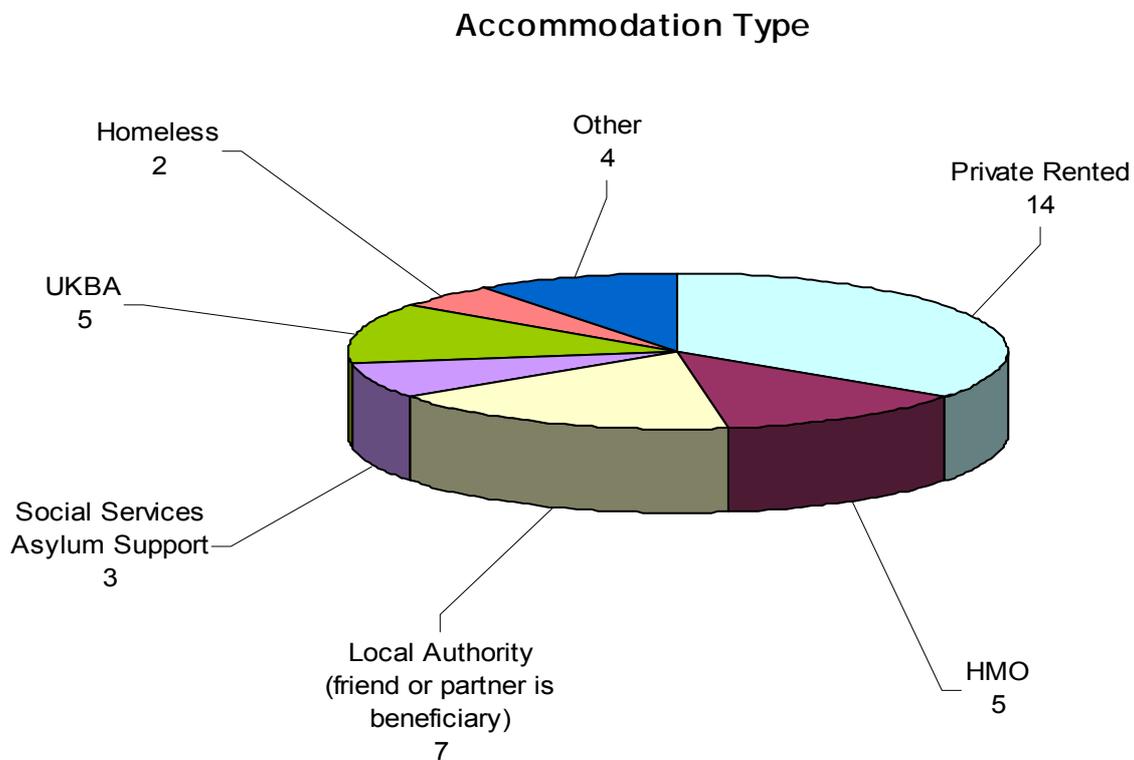
- **Basis of Claim:** All of the 37 asylum seekers and refugees who had filed claims had filed their asylum claims based upon their sexuality. There were a remaining two interviewees who had not filed asylum claims and were living illegally in the country and one interviewee was currently on a student visa and planning to apply for asylum when the visa expires in the spring of 2009.
- **Age:** 58 per cent (23) of respondents were between the ages of 30 and 44 while 30 per cent (12) were between the ages of 25 and 29. 12 per cent (5) were aged 18 to 24 and no one aged 45 and over was interviewed for the purposes of this research.
- **Gender Identities:** 70 per cent (28) of respondents were biologically male, 25 per cent (10) biologically female, and five per cent (2) transgender.
- **Sexuality:** 67.5 per cent (27) were gay men, 22.5 per cent (9) lesbian, seven-and-a-half per cent (3) bisexual, and two-and-a-half per cent (1) heterosexual (a transgender person who was attracted to members of the opposite gender).
- **Countries of Origin:** Angola (1), Armenia (1), DR Congo (2), Gambia (1), Iran (9), Iraq (4), Jamaica (7), Kenya (2), Kuwait (1), Malawi (1), Nigeria (4), Pakistan (3), Saudi Arabia (1), Sierra Leone (1), Uganda (2).
- **Current City:** 70 per cent (28) currently lived in Greater London and 30 per cent (12) lived elsewhere in the UK, predominantly the Northwest and Northeast.
- **Access to Legal Advice Services:** 92.5 per cent of the sample has accessed legal

advice services through LGBT or black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME), mainstream refugee and asylum seeker organisations, or through Social Services.

3.2. Housing

3.2.1. Accommodation types

The chart below shows that the accommodation type for most respondents was private rented. This was followed by local authority, housing in multiple occupation (HMO), United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) asylum support accommodation, Social Services asylum support, whilst two respondents were currently experiencing homelessness. It is important to note however that those LGBT asylum seekers staying in private rented accommodation were not paying rent, but were living with partners and acquaintances and therefore technically homeless, an issue that will be explored further in section 3.4.



3.2.2. Housemates

Respondents commonly resided with friends (17) or partners (7) while significant numbers resided alone (6), with other asylum seekers (5), with random housemates (3), and some with their families (2).

The choice of housemates was largely determined by financial necessity and immigration status. As asylum seekers with little or no source of viable personal income, most interviewees lived with people who would take them into their own accommodation on a rent-free basis, knowing their sexuality and often expecting sexual favours in return.

At the same time this reliance on friends and partners to an extent mediates the experience of overt anti-LGBT discrimination in the home because many respondents were living with other LGBT people. However, those living in UKBA and Social Services asylum support accommodation were more susceptible to anti-LGBT discrimination, or found it necessary to hide their LGBT identities, because they had no choice whom they lived with and were often placed with asylum seekers who held anti-LGBT sentiments.

3.2.3. Landlords

When asked whether or not they report problems with their accommodation, and who they report them to, most interviewees responded that they were not in direct contact with landlords or property managers as many were staying on as extra-contractual tenants in private rented flats, HMOs, and council accommodations registered in friends' or partners' names. For this reason many respondents rely on their friends and partners to either contact landlords or take care of housing issues themselves.

I don't have a landlord, I live with another two persons who are my friends and I don't pay rent. They are taking care of me.

IRANIAN LESBIAN, 25-29 YEARS OLD

Those few who did approach landlords and property management personnel directly often faced indifference or discrimination.

Yes, there are problems with the shower and I reported them to the landlord but it seems like he doesn't care.

IRANIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

This indifference and discrimination appeared to be related to interviewees' immigration status and financial problems more often than their LGBT identities and reflects a common experience for all asylum seekers. When landlords knew that a person was not paying rent or staying on without a contract they tended not to value their requests for repairs and maintenance.

However, in a few cases interviewees did describe overt homophobic or transphobic discrimination or harassment from landlords which resulted in them fearing for their safety. This anti-LGBT discrimination was an additional layer of hardship that some LGBT asylum seekers faced on top of immigration-related issues and financial insecurity.

Because the landlord wasn't gay and the people living in the house were gay, so he was giving a lot of problems to people in the house -- a lot of cursing. I didn't feel so safe.

NIGERIAN GAY MAN, 24 YEARS OLD

I have had problems with the landlord. He would not give me peace. He knew I was an asylum seeker and he would open my mail. He kicked me out because I was gay. The landlord never liked me.

ARMENIAN GAY MAN, 25-29 YEARS OLD

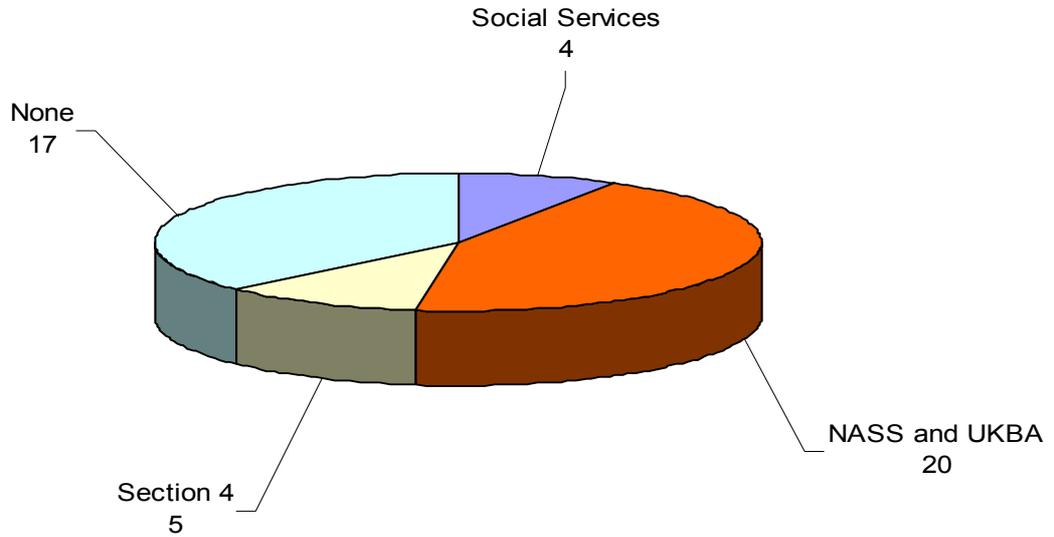
3.2.4. Key findings

- 60 per cent of the sample of LGBT asylum seekers live with friends and partners in private rented accommodations or are living in houses of multiple occupation.
- Financial necessity and the goodwill of others largely determines where and with whom many LGBT asylum seekers live.
- Many LGBT asylum seekers do not interact directly with landlords and property managers because they are not legal tenants.
- LGBT asylum seekers who do interact directly with landlords and property managers often face indifference or discrimination by these parties. Whilst this experience is similar to that faced by many other asylum seekers, in some cases this is specifically because they are LGBT and face homophobic or transphobic discrimination from landlords and property managers.
- Being LGBT and asylum seekers weakens the position for some and gives them less bargaining power when it comes to the upkeep of properties.

3.3. Asylum support services

All respondents were familiar with asylum support services available through the UKBA (until 2006 accommodation and/or income support was provided through the National Asylum Support Service), Local Authority Social Services, and Section 4 support for failed asylum seekers. 57.5 per cent had previously utilised one or more of these services during their time in the UK as the following chart demonstrates. However, 42.5 per cent of respondents had never accessed any form of asylum support services, indicating the presence of barriers to access for the sample group.

Services Previously Utilised

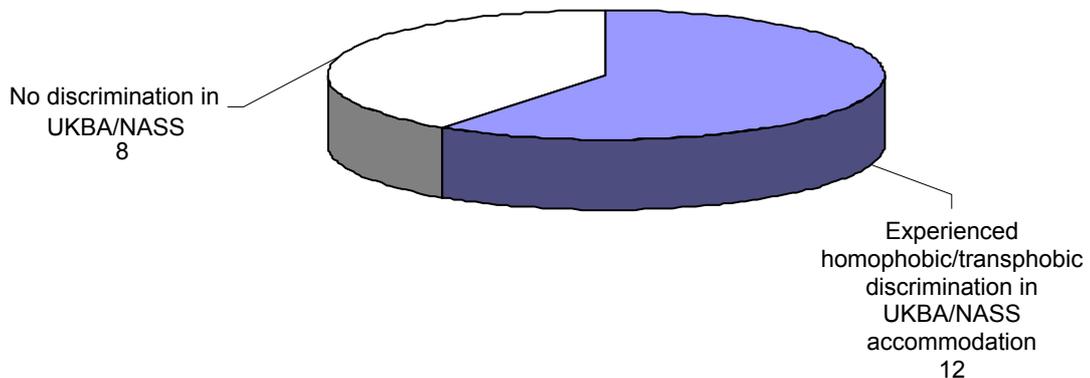


3.3.1 United Kingdom Border Agency asylum support

Respondent attitudes toward UKBA (formerly NASS) asylum support were broadly negative. Two main areas of complaint emerged: the experience of homophobic and transphobic harassment and dissatisfaction with the material condition of UKBA accommodation.

Homophobic and transphobic discrimination, most commonly from other asylum-seeking housemates, was a common experience for respondents who had lived in UKBA accommodation. Nearly two thirds (63%) of respondents who had lived in UKBA accommodation had experienced homophobic or transphobic discrimination during their stay.

Discrimination in UKBA and NASS Accommodation



This discrimination was described as either discomfort or fear over disclosing one's sexuality to other housemates or, in some cases, the experience of direct homophobic or transphobic harassment from housemates and landlords.

NASS is the one who gives me the accommodation. The government provides me with this accommodation. I hate having to share. I am the only gay man in the property. I feel awkward inviting my boyfriend to the property. The people I share with are all straight and it's really hard. The landlord is Indian and he knows I am gay. He seems to look at me funny. I don't feel comfortable but I don't have a choice.

ARMENIAN GAY MAN, 25-29 YEARS OLD

I was placed in Leeds [in UKBA accommodation] but felt isolated and two guys tried to rape me so I ran away and came back to London. Because I did not report it I was not offered any more accommodation again by NASS.

PAKISTANI LESBIAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

While living in the NASS accommodation I have been called a bloody lesbian by one of the French girls; I just had to live with it. I was harassed all the time because of my sexuality, which is sad really, it was not because of my race because we are all black and the only thing they could pick on was my sexuality.

GAMBIAN LESBIAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

When encountering discrimination or abuse in UKBA accommodation several respondents encountered resistance or indifference when they reported the problems.

I have asked NASS to move me because of the harassment, and they say they would look into it but nothing was done so I had to go through a solicitor, for me to move from where I was living before, because I was being harassed, and this is why I am with social service now, it had to take a solicitor to get out of NASS accommodation where I was being harassed.

GAMBIAN LESBIAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

The occurrence of anti-LGBT discrimination in UKBA asylum support accommodation can be divided roughly into discrimination from housemates (other asylum seekers) and discrimination from UKBA and property management staff.

The second major area of complaint among those who had or were living in UKBA asylum support accommodation was around material condition and cleanliness as articulated by an interviewee.

Lots of problems, because I am an asylum seeker I can not afford to buy anything, I was put into an empty accommodation [by NASS], no bed sheet, no cooking pots, no nothing. The bed even if you put it in a dumping ground the bed would be the dumping ground, that's how bad the bed was, it was awful really.

GAMBIAN LESBIAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

Once NASS gave me accommodation in Ashford in Kent which was a multiple accommodation with small rooms and the service wasn't good. It was a poor facility to just live.

IRAQI GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

Although some dissatisfaction with the material condition of asylum support accommodation is not unique to LGBT asylum seekers, the experience of homophobic and transphobic discrimination in those accommodations is. This indicates important areas for improvement in UKBA asylum support services in regard to LGBT clients. A major area of focus needs to be an expansion of choice in housemates and accommodation location. Clearly most LGBT asylum seekers feel more comfortable living with other LGBT people, especially if they are people from a similar cultural or ethnic background.

3.3.2 Property management companies

The accommodation providers to which UKBA contracts asylum support accommodation services are often the first point of contact for asylum seekers that are living in asylum support accommodation. Complaints and requests are commonly addressed first to property managers and often the property management companies deal directly with requests for change of accommodation, including requests for change based upon experiences of anti-LGBT harassment. This makes the policy and practice of accommodation providers an important point of reference in any analysis of UKBA asylum support accommodation services.

In many cases the experiences of LGBT asylum seekers at the hands of accommodation providers mirrors those of other asylum seekers. For example:

Q: When you were having problems with the property management company did you complain to anybody else, such as the Home Office or UKBA, or the Local Council or did you go to anyone else?

No, because at the beginning when you come to this country you are like a blank person. You don't know about the system and how it works and what you can do and because I couldn't speak English very well I couldn't understand that all of these things, we were just phoning the [property management company] because they gave us a phone number and said, "Just phone us and we will sort it." And we were just phoning them. They don't

care about us. They don't think asylum seekers are the same as human.

IRAQI GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

NASS, NASS, NASS is the same though. They don't care as long as they get an agent or an agency - people they are paying for accommodation. They don't care because when I was having my problems they were not good at all.

SIERRA LEONEAN LESBIAN, 18-24 YEARS OLD

However, the poor customer service of accommodation providers becomes crucial for LGBT asylum seekers when it is applied to problems arising from an asylum seeker's sexuality such as harassment from other tenants. This reflects an absence of adequate policy, procedures, and staff training within some contracted property management in relation to LGBT issues, leading to a failure to provide for alternative arrangements that may address harassment and abuse.

I was very happy there [in a UKBA single accommodation]; I lived there just over a year. Then [property management company] lost their contract with the Home Office. And this current housing management, they took over and they said, "You're a single man, you don't need a single accommodation, just need a single room." I said, "What about those problems that happened to me?" They said, "No, we send you to a shared accommodation, see if anything happens to you then we move you to another place." It's their policy. I said, "What about my experience? I faced loads of harassment, loads of stuff from previous places." They said, "No, no, you cannot judge people until something happens to you."

They don't understand. They expect me to live in shared house until I get harassed or get attacked, and when I get a big bruise on my face or a scar on my face then I go to Refugee Council so they can send me to another place. And they say, "OK yeah, we send you to another shared accommodation for the hope that the new people are very nice and understanding," which doesn't happen.

IRANIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

3.3.3 Social services asylum support

Social Services provide asylum support accommodation for destitute asylum seekers. As with UKBA asylum support accommodation, complaints about the material condition of accommodations were high among those interviewees receiving accommodation support from Social Service departments.

Yes there is a leaking roof, and this water is running down the electrical wires, so the Council came and disconnected the lights and suggest we get bedside lamps for the time being. Then there is mildew on the walls that makes the house cold and as a result I constantly have a cold.

JAMAICAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

Similar to experiences with UKBA asylum support accommodation and rented accommodation interviewees faced difficulty or indifference when requesting maintenance or new appliances.

I have been telling the council but because we are asylum seekers they don't care about us, they would rather pay the landlord a huge sum of money, but for us we don't matter because if they are paying the landlord they have the right to ask the landlord to bring this that and the other. The oven has not been working since I am living there and they are telling me to improvise. They would rather give the money to the landlord and see us suffer. I have stopped calling them because it is inconvenient. At the council the lady said I should be grateful I have a roof over my head.

GAMBIAN LESBIAN, 34 YEARS OLD

However, there were fewer complaints about discrimination and homophobia from personnel working in Social Services and asylum support accommodation. This is perhaps due to progressive policies and diversity training for Social Services staff. Additionally, the location of all Social Service asylum support accommodations in this sample were in London, and this fact likely mediates homophobic discrimination in the home or diminishes its salience as an issue since respondents have improved access to LGBT services and networks in the capital.

3.3.4 Detention centres

Seven respondents had previously spent time in UKBA detention facilities. By and large these were described in unpleasant and unfavourable terms. Although this is to be expected from most asylum seekers who have been detained, it is clear that LGBT asylum seekers face additional homophobic and transphobic abuse in detention facilities. This includes abuse from other detainees and in some cases a lack of sensitivity from UKBA staff.

In the following example a Ugandan gay man was placed with heterosexual Jamaican men.

I was in detention with the other Jamaican men and they didn't like me and were swearing to me in bad language about gay man.

UGANDAN GAY MAN, 25-29 YEARS OLD

I was taken to a detention centre near Heathrow and I was treated disgustingly. I was physically and mentally hurt; I was in a fight and only remember waking up in a hospital bed, from the day I entered up on to the day I left. And I thought they already knew I was a gay man and at the time I was in so many pains I was not conscious, so I do not remember.

JAMAICAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

Yes, some were OK with it but some did not take it well, and when I reported being bullied to the detention staff I was moved from one detention centre to another detention centre in the UK. This was a terrible time for me. [...] When I was in prison recently within the last 12 months I was working in the detention centre dining area and I was verbally abused by another Jamaican that I am not Jamaican but a batty boy (gay man) and this was done in the presence of 4 detention officers who reported the matter. I was interviewed by the governor and then the chief immigration officer interviewed me and then moved me to Hammondsworth detention centre. I am constantly being moved around whenever my sexuality is disclosed.

JAMAICAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

Lack of sensitivity from detention facility staff or willingness to accommodate alternative arrangements within detention centres was a common experience for LGBT asylum seekers. Requests to be moved from cells that contained other people from the same cultural and ethnic backgrounds were often met with insensitivity or indifference.

Yes – Detention Centre Yarlwood and also in Scotland, but I don't remember the name of the detention centre in Scotland. When they find out you're a lesbian people discriminate you and try to take advantage of you and even try rape you. Even where I live now they try to discriminate me. I get verbal abuse, especially people from my country. The Staff was ok, I asked not to be put in the same room as an African, and she tried her best but I was still place in a room with an African lady who speaks my own language.

I was then moved after a while.

NIGERIAN LESBIAN, 35 YEARS OLD

The lack of ability or willingness for detention facility staff to provide for preferred gender medical examiners was also a major issue, and indicates a lack of diversity training for detention facility staff members.

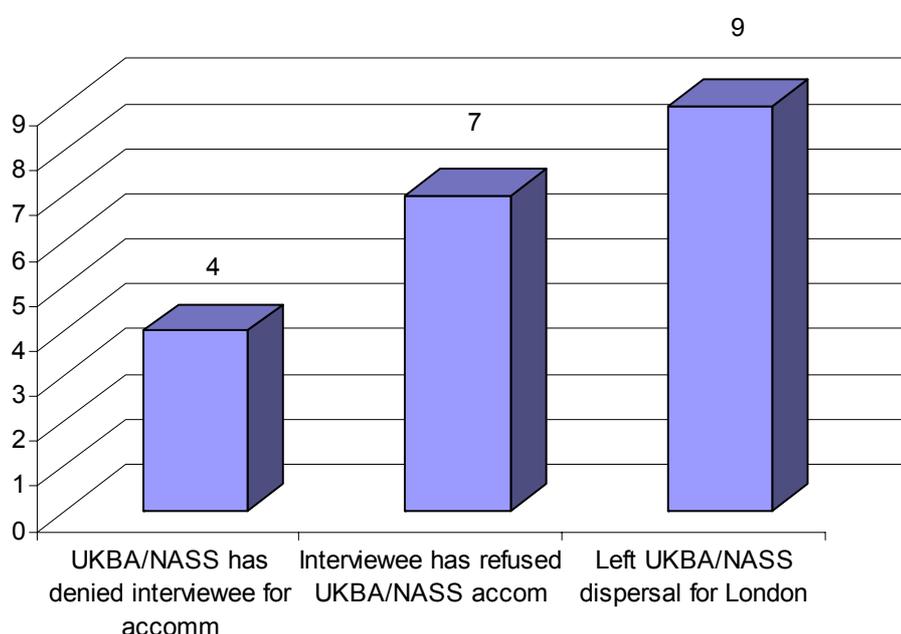
Four-and-a-half months. And female detention centre. Everybody there asking me, "How you having sex with your girlfriend?" Even immigration officer asking me, "What are you, male or female?" I say, "What do you mean?" Whole world asking me this question so now I am confused. So I say, "Female." He say, "No, I am confused. So I send you in

medical examination.” The immigration officer asked me, “Are you comfortable with female or male doctor.” I said female doctor. He said, “If we don’t have female doctor what do we do? You go to the male doctor.” This is immigration officer, a Home Office person.
TRANSGENDER MALE, COUNTRY AND AGE UNDISCLOSED

3.3.5 The pull to London

Many respondents, though destitute and aware of the UKBA’s asylum support accommodation services, prefer to stay in London. Seven respondents had refused UKBA accommodation and a further nine had left UKBA accommodation in dispersal sites to return to London.

UKBA and NASS Encounters



When asked why they would prefer not to take UKBA accommodation interviewees commonly described a strong desire not to leave London and the partners, friends, and social networks that they relied upon there. Whilst these are reasons cited by other asylum seekers, for LGBT asylum seekers this can be a particular concern due to the absence of family support networks. Similarly, outside London they fear they will not have access to appropriate legal advice that understands how to present a case for asylum where sexuality or gender identity is the ground for the claim.

Yes I applied for Refugee Council and they said you need to go out side of London but I have health problems and also heavy depression. I can not go because my partner and my friends are here and I feel lonely. I want to live in London so I decided to work illegally so I can be able to pay for my rent.

IRANIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

How can I go Midlands because I don't know anything about Midlands? No friends, if I want to come to UKLGIG meeting or Female-to-Male meeting every week or every month, or any other organisation. There are many organisations in London. How can I attend this meeting?

TRANSGENDER MALE, COUNTRY AND AGE UNDISCLOSED

I have depression and could stay alone that's why I left the flat which NASS gave me and came to London.

JAMAICAN LESBIAN, 30 YEARS OLD

Similarly, those who had left UKBA accommodation to return to London or Manchester spoke of the draw of partners and friends in London and Manchester, LGBT organisations that are not found in areas of dispersal, and the need to flee from homophobic and transphobic discrimination.

When I came to England NASS send me to Ashford in Kent, it was like a hotel with small rooms. They put me in a small room with another straight person that I was not comfortable with them; it was a small house with one black one Somali two Kurdish and one Arabic person. They didn't know that I am a gay. I did not stay long.

IRAQI GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

When they sent me to Leeds I was with another lady but I didn't feel comfortable with them all the time they picking on me because the look I had and I was different to them. Finally I couldn't take more than that so I moved back to London.

PAKISTANI LESBIAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

After that they dispersed me to Liverpool. I said, "Why can't you disperse me to Manchester? I have a partner here. I have Medical Foundation coming. I want to stay here." They said, "No, Liverpool, you have no choice." It is a bad experience. Because you need to be close to the people you love, to peoples' support.

KENYAN GAY MAN, 25-29 YEARS OLD

This research indicates that there is a strong and significant pull toward London for LGBT asylum seekers, and toward Manchester for some dispersed LGBT asylum seekers in the north. This is mainly due to the presence of LGBT-friendly communities and services and personal connections to partners and friends that were sometimes made before the period of dispersal.

The overall high level of LGBT asylum seeker dependency upon friends, partners, and LGBT social networks would indicate the necessity of living in large urban areas with sizeable LGBT communities and the prevalence of LGBT community organisations. For many LGBT asylum seekers London and Manchester appear to be the only viable localities offering the services and

networks that are crucial to their survival. By integrating themselves within LGBT social networks many LGBT asylum seekers are able to cope with their legal and financial insecurity and buffer themselves from homophobic and transphobic discrimination.

3.3.6 Key findings

- LGBT asylum seekers often face harassment from other non LGBT asylum seeking housemates in UKBA asylum support accommodation and indifference from UKBA staff and accommodation providers when reporting these issues.
- Asylum support accommodation providers contracted by UKBA are sometimes lacking in awareness of LGBT issues and protocol for dealing with them.
- Most LGBT asylum seekers who have been held in UKBA detention facilities face extreme forms of harassment and abuse from other detainees and indifference from detention facility staff.
- Many LGBT asylum seekers leave UKBA asylum support accommodation to return to London and other large metropolitan areas such as Manchester.
- Many LGBT asylum seekers have refused to take UKBA dispersal accommodation for fears of being separated from partners, friends, and social support networks in London and other large metropolitan areas.

3.4. Vulnerability

Interviewees' financial problems, housing difficulties, uncertain immigration status and LGBT identities interact to put them in vulnerable situations where exploitation may occur. The research clearly shows there is increased vulnerability for LGBT asylum seekers, and there are qualitative differences in how this exploitation is experienced that differ from experiences of exploitation among the general asylum seeking population.

For many LGBT asylum seekers vulnerability is manifested in increased mobility and hidden homelessness, an increased likelihood of experiencing discrimination and abuse in the home, a greater likelihood of enduring such abuses in silence, and a general disinclination to report abuse and discrimination to the authorities.

3.4.1. Mobility and hidden homelessness

This research has determined the transience that LGBT asylum seekers face when it comes to living in and moving to new areas and accommodations. By and large most of the interviewees were staying in accommodation where they did not pay rent. For this reason many respondents felt their present living situations to be exceedingly precarious and totally reliant upon the goodwill and favourable financial situation of friends, partners, family members and acquaintances. In reality, homelessness and hidden homelessness is commonplace for asylum seekers, however LGBT asylum seekers are at a distinct disadvantage because their sexuality or gender identity is

often the cause of their transience and determines whom they rely upon for support.

In this sense many of the respondents may be considered technically homeless in that they are not paying for their accommodation, have no contractual protection against indiscriminate eviction or substandard conditions, and have little idea how long they can expect to stay. This uncertainty is compounded for many respondents by overarching uncertainty regarding pending Home Office rulings on their asylum claims which contributes to chronic anxiety, an issue that will be explored in greater detail in section 4.9 on health issues.

When asked why they have had to move between accommodations in the UK most answered that it was a combination of financial reasons, asylum process-related issues, and an over reliance on partners, friends and family that had caused them to move multiple times.

I moved in with my partner and we were together for 10 months so I was staying with him for that period and then when he died I moved in with a friend for a few weeks [...] I was jobless, I had nothing, and I just felt like I couldn't contribute [...] and then he felt it was becoming too much for him so I needed to find somewhere else but I met someone on the internet and he said you can move in with me so I moved in with the guy [...] I wasn't paying, he was actually taking care of me.

NIGERIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

Many described the difficult times, constantly moving between accommodation provided by friends and acquaintances which barely kept them from living on the streets.

No, not homelessness in the sense I have no where to stay, because I always find a friend to stay with a few months. I am not entitled to any benefits, so I get money from friends. I had a falling out with friends I am staying with, so I had to move.

JAMAICAN LESBIAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

I was slightly homeless; I was sleeping around with friends and stuff like that until I applied for asylum.

NIGERIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

Not homelessness per se, but the fear of homelessness. Where am I going to go? What am I going to do? And also the matter of finding a place where I feel safe, confident. And the issue about being gay, because you are afraid of being revealed.

IRANIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

I can't say. I have lived in many accommodations because my boyfriend has problems like alcohol, so I have to make myself comfortable and have some time for myself. So I have been living like at 10 different places with friends; 3 days here, 4 days there.

IRANIAN GAY MAN, 25-29 YEARS OLD

I used to live in east London with a lady for nine to ten months. That's the longest I have ever lived at one place. Now I stay sometimes one week or two before I have to relocate again.

PAKISTANI LESBIAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

No respondent had lived in less than two accommodations during their time in the UK, and roughly one-quarter had lived in ten or more accommodations during an average stay in the UK of five years. LGBT asylum seekers' experiences are qualitatively different from those of the general asylum seeking population because the occurrence of homophobic and transphobic discrimination is often the trigger that causes frequent moving and homelessness. This link has been explored in other research that demonstrates how LGBT identity can be the direct cause of homelessness for young people in the UK as homophobia in the home may lead to young LGBT people being thrown out.⁹

The reason why I left the house I was staying in Greenwich was because they couldn't understand my sexuality and it was becoming an issue so when I was leaving I specifically looked for a "Gayshare" house.

NIGERIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

I was living with family and friends but as soon as my sexuality came out it caused problems so I just moved out.

NIGERIAN LESBIAN, 35 YEARS OLD

3.4.2. Discrimination and harassment

Many interviewees experienced problems with their accommodation specifically associated with being LGBT. Most found it difficult to both be open about their LGBT identity with the people they currently lived with and to find accommodation generally where they could be open about their sexuality and gender identify.

I can't be open about my sexuality because I'm scared, especially if my flatmate knows I'm gay he'll kick me out.

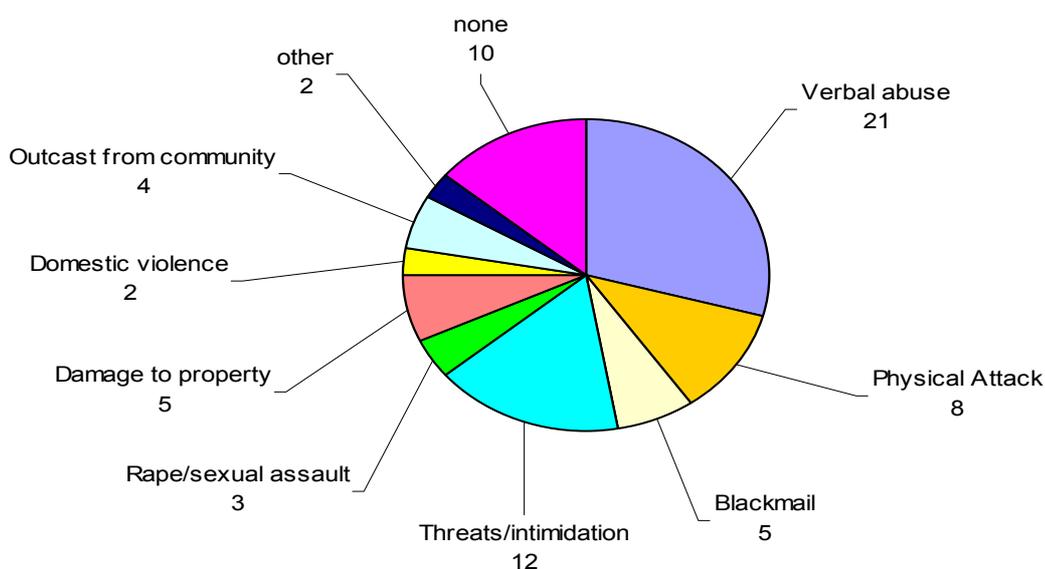
IRAQI GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

In the past twelve months three-quarters of respondents or members of their households had experienced some form of harassment within or near their accommodations. Most attributed this harassment to being LGBT, while several attributed it to racism. Several people had received harassment specifically because they were asylum seekers and two because of anti-homelessness sentiments they faced during nights sleeping rough.

One third of those who had experienced harassment in their accommodations in the past year were still experiencing ongoing harassment. The occurrence of ongoing harassment indicates either a failure to report it, or indifference from authorities who could regulate the anti-social behaviour of other housemates. Two thirds of those who had experienced harassment in their accommodations in the past year were no longer experiencing the harassment. This does not appear to be due to support they have received from organisations, but is probably due to leaving the accommodation where the harassment occurred which indicates the link between anti-LGBT harassment and increased mobility and homelessness.

The following graph demonstrates that in the past twelve months most interviewees had received some form of abuse related to being LGBT. For most this was name-calling and verbal abuse encountered in public, while nearly one-third had been threatened or intimidated and nearly one-quarter of respondents had been physically attacked. About one-quarter had not experienced any form of abuse in relation to being LGBT.

In the Past 12 Months Have You Experienced Any of the Following for Being LGBT?



Clearly homophobic and transphobic fears affect the ways in which respondents conduct their daily lives and activities. Many had consciously changed their appearance or image to integrate

⁹ Deborah Gold (2005). *Sexual Exclusion: issues and best practice in lesbian, gay, and bisexual housing and homelessness*. London: Shelter and Stonewall Housing.

into their local community, refrained from showing affection to someone of the same gender when in public, changed who they socialised with, changed where they lived, and avoided neighbourhood events in response to homophobic and transphobic fears.

Consciously striving to fit in and adapt their behaviour out of fear of homophobic and transphobic discrimination undoubtedly compounded the experience of persecution that many individuals suffered in their home countries.

3.4.3. Fear of disclosing LGBT identity

Fear of discrimination in turn affected respondents' decisions about how and to whom they disclosed their sexuality and gender identities. Most had told their parents and siblings, although many had become estranged from their family as a result of this disclosure. This indicates a loss of vital familial support both in their countries of origin and in the UK for many LGBT asylum seekers that other migrants and asylum seekers commonly rely upon. This indicates a qualitative difference in LGBT asylum seekers' experiences of social exclusion compared to the general asylum seeking population because they are often forced to construct their own support networks in the absence of family and ethnic or national networks.

Due to the nature of most of the respondents' asylum claims, almost all had told their solicitors about their LGBT identities. Most had told their GP's, Community Psychiatric Nurses, Housing Authorities and UKBA personnel, and other social workers and volunteers with whom they were in contact. About a third had not disclosed their LGBT identities with some or all of the people they currently lived with and this indicates the additional stress of living a 'double life' for many LGBT asylum seekers and suggests that they are most vulnerable in the accommodation setting.

I have to change my lifestyle and I have to dress like them. So I can't live my life because of the black people. So I have to dress in a tidy way, like they do, so I can fit into that society.

KENYAN GAY MAN, 25-29 YEARS OLD

I started going to the gym and building muscles and acting very manly and trying to cover up something. But not really consciously, I just felt for the safety of my life I'll just conform to some extent to what these people want from me and they'll leave me at peace.

NIGERIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

However, some interviewees indicated that they had disclosed their LGBT identities with some of the people they lived with as they did not want to live 'closeted' lives in the UK.

That's why I am here because I feel I couldn't do that back at home in Nigeria, that's why I am seeking asylum to be very free and open, so there's no reason to hide my sexuality when I am free.

NIGERIAN GAY MAN, 18- 24 YEARS OLD

3.4.4. Safety

Reflecting on problems with housing, discrimination and hidden homelessness, one quarter of respondents felt unsafe or very unsafe in their current accommodation. These figures do not appear to deviate markedly from attitudes toward personal safety amongst the general asylum seeking population. They are surprising though in light of the testimonies of discrimination and harassment endured in and around respondents' accommodations.

What these responses may indicate is that either: respondents accept that some measure of discrimination will be endured which they do not necessarily equate with a lack of safety, or the housing conditions and daily challenges faced in the UK are perhaps an improvement on what many faced in their home countries.

Additionally, their attitudes on safety in current accommodations might reflect the fact that many interviewees are comparing their experiences with previous stays in UKBA accommodations (outside London) where, as it has been demonstrated, homophobic and transphobic harassment were a regular occurrence.

These responses indicate a lack of awareness amongst many LGBT asylum seekers as to what constitutes discrimination, harassment, and hate crime. Tolerating abuse simply because it is less severe than what an individual has endured in the past, or out of apathy borne of years of enduring abuse, are not reliable indicators of the experience of personal safety in the home. The following testimonies demonstrate how the experience of homophobic discrimination is not necessarily equated with a lack of safety for some LGBT asylum seekers.

Q: How safe do you feel in your accommodation?

My biggest problem is homophobia, and I feel safe. There are no burglaries. I feel safe.

KENYAN GAY MAN, 25-29 YEARS OLD

I feel safe, but mentally I don't feel safe. They are all straight people and I can't express myself so I am not comfortable.

JAMAICAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

Additionally, an important component of safety in living accommodations is the experience in the surrounding environment. Half of respondents for instance felt unsafe or very unsafe in the surrounding neighbourhood at night. Feelings of fear and danger were especially marked among

interviewees who were living in UKBA dispersed asylum support accommodations which were often located in socially and economically marginalised areas.

The most big problem was the main door wasn't secure and the building was very dirty and always, sometimes when I come back I see drug dealers and drunk people on the stairs and problems with, you know some of those people are very racist and they don't like foreign people and sometimes they swear at us and things like that.

IRAQI GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

It is clear from respondents' testimonies that their LGBT identities marked them out for direct harassment from neighbours and local people in areas of dispersal.

The house itself is OK, but it's a really rough area. Just next door is a drug dealer. They were arguing over a piece of cannabis or whatever two nights ago, fighting with each other outside. And a few houses further, they were producing cannabis in their home. Police came and broke the door, arrest all of them. And everybody is walking in the street with their dog. And they give you looks because we don't have the same attitude as they have. We look a bit different, or wear clothing a bit differently. I'm sure trouble is starting because the guy next door started calling my friend 'gay boy' and it starts from there. One says 'gay boy', the other one says 'poof' the other one says 'shirt-lifter' the other says 'bent bastard.' And we just have to move, come and go quietly without saying anything.

IRANIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

They [UKBA] said, "You move to Bradford in emergency accommodation," and that's why. And really very bad. I had a bad time in Bradford near two months. In Muslim area, all of them Muslims, and everyday somebody called me poof or, in Pakistani language 'kosra' or 'gandu' it means poof or f--- you.

IRANIAN GAY MAN, 25-29 YEARS OLD

I live in an area where there is a lot of black people. If I am going out, the way I am dressed, they start talking and because they are so homophobic they call you gay and they call you in the language, Jamaican, or whatever language, they abuse you and call you different names.

KENYAN GAY MAN, 25-29 YEARS OLD

Q: Is there crime in the area?

There are people doing criminal things. Taking drugs, having too much problems, fighting with each other. It's around the place where I live [UKBA accommodation], the environment where I live, the surroundings, it is not safe for me because of my sexuality. I think they are most of them homophobic.

IRAQI GAY MAN, 25-29 YEARS OLD

3.4.5. Sexual exploitation

Several respondents described facing sexual exploitation on multiple occasions. These experiences usually arose from encounters in LGBT venues and social scenes where respondents sometimes went to exchange sex for money, temporary accommodation, or food. Although those respondents who did infrequent sex work claimed to normally be in control of their own decision-making, at times economic necessity and social marginalisation made them especially vulnerable to abusive forms of exploitation.

Yeah, even in gay bars, I have to, they knew, in bad situations I have to survive. I need money and food in my stomach and they try to abuse me and take advantage of me.

IRANIAN GAY MAN, 25- 29 YEARS OLD

Additionally, several interviewees faced sexual exploitation in their accommodation. This usually took the form of feeling obligated to perform sexual favours for acquaintances who were temporarily housing them.

If someone is helping you, they want something back in return and I wasn't feeling comfortable so I had to leave. He said you can't give me sex so you can't stay with me and you have to go.

CONGOLESE GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

This exploitation potentially placed the interviewee's health and personal wellbeing at significant risk.

I don't do sex without using a condom but sometimes you find that someone knows that you are really desperate and they will ask you to have sex with them without a condom and you can't say no, but I've been standing up for myself to say no because I can get 50 pounds but these 50 pounds can cost my life because what if that someone is infected?

MALAWIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

All of the respondents who described both casual sex work and sexual exploitation in their accommodations or other settings were gay men. However, two lesbian interviewees described feeling exceptionally vulnerable to sexual assault in their accommodations and attributed it to

homophobic and sexist attitudes of housemates who were from the same nationality.

I was once assaulted by one of my flatmates, a Nigerian guy, who found out about my sexuality because he saw me in Soho. When I returned home he tried to rape me along with his friends. I reported it to the police.

NIGERIAN LESBIAN, 35 YEARS OLD

3.4.6. Informal labour and other exploitation

Some interviewees described other forms of exploitation that they experienced. The most common form was being obligated to perform unpaid labour and chores in their accommodation without having any choice. The precarious nature of informal living arrangements and the necessity of relying on the whims of others put many respondents in vulnerable positions where refusing labour demands would mean homelessness or destitution.

Because I don't have my own place I am treated like a slave at some of the places I stay. I have to sleep on the kitchen floor and do the washing and cleaning.

PAKISTANI LESBIAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

They would ask you to do things like looking after the kids or ask you to do gardening and at the end of the day you find you are doing nothing and I had to move out. I've been really trying but I didn't know what to do.

MALAWIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

These forms of informal labour exploitation do not appear to be unique to LGBT asylum seekers, as many asylum seekers face similar informal labour demands due to shared sources of fundamental legal and financial insecurity. However, the lack of other support networks available to LGBT asylum seekers places an additional stress on many of them as they depend more heavily on tenuous relationships where exploitation is more likely to occur and this contributes to the increased mobility of LGBT asylum seekers.

Additionally, forms of exploitation unique to LGBT asylum seekers can centre upon blackmail and slander that expose or threaten to expose the subject's LGBT identity in environments where this is highly undesirable and dangerous. The following case study demonstrates how one interviewee experienced attempted sexual exploitation and slander in an informal workplace that ultimately resulted in the interviewee losing his job and becoming destitute.

I was in trouble once at work because there was this other guy who I think was fancying me and he really wanted me to have sex with him so I think I went into the toilet and he followed me and later on he went and said that I was showing him my private parts. It wasn't true. [...] The boss said to me, "Are you gay or something?" I said "Why? It's got

nothing to do with my sexuality". He said it's based on what the other guy said but I said that I was just there, standing there and having a wee and he came to me and looked at me. They said they need to do an investigation and later on when I came back they asked me about papers.

MALAWIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

This case study demonstrates the very powerful role that LGBT identity plays in exacerbating the vulnerability and tendency for exploitation among LGBT asylum seekers.

3.4.7. Fear of authorities and reporting abuse

Reluctance to report problems or abuse to housing authorities, UKBA personnel, or the police was common among the sample group. Of those interviewees who had experienced LGBT harassment in their accommodation, fewer people had reported the harassment than those who had not. This finding demonstrates a reluctance to report harassment to officials that is similar to the aforementioned reluctance to report housing problems to landlords and property managers.

When asked why they did not report abuse to the authorities, several interviewees expressed a general disinclination born out of scepticism that anything would be done about it.

No – I did not report it, it was later on I was talking to my colleagues I told them and they told me I should report it, but I did not report it.

GAMBIAN LESBIAN, 34 YEARS OLD

Q: Did you ever report this harassment to anyone?

No, because my friend had some problems, and my other friend complain and report the problem to the Metropolitan Police. I don't know what happened with that.

TRANSGENDER MALE, AGE AND COUNTRY UNDISCLOSED

Perhaps confirming this scepticism, several of those who had reported incidents of abuse or harassment felt that no one had followed up on their complaints.

Q: Have you reported the harassment?

Yes, to the police but they have not done anything.

ANGOLESE LESBIAN, 18- 24 YEARS OLD

How many people can I complain? How many times can I complain? I ring police a few times and I said I got harassed in the street and I rang 999 and the lady was trying to tell me "Maybe they want to be your friends?" I said "What kind of friendship is that? Would you call your friends poof, or shirt lifter?" It's ridiculous. Police is useless, hopeless. Then another time it was actually quite serious. I reported it to police a few times.

There was a guy who was really nasty with my friend. Once they stopped their car outside my house because my friend was in my home and then they started arguing and swearing to him in the street. We called the police, they took quite serious action for that.

Both of us, me and my friend, we got interviewed by the police and told the story. And then once a couple of big policemen came to our house and said they were going to handcuff that guy and arrest him. But we've never heard anything from them, from police, we don't know if they actually arrested him or did anything. It was the last time and I got really hopeless. Really helpless and I thought I'd better stop doing it because they won't do anything for me.

IRANIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

For several interviewees, the reluctance to report problems and abuse appeared to come from an overarching fear of deportation and mistrust of the authorities.

I feel unsafe, mostly from police and deportation.

IRANIAN GAY MAN, 25-29 YEARS OLD

I don't want to be so much in the picture that the police would know. And I would rather be safe than sorry.

KENYAN GAY MAN, 25-29 YEARS OLD

For some this was compounded by fears of racism and perceived inequity in British society.

I feel very unsafe. Every day the police stop and search me, and I don't feel safe being a black male in this area.

JAMAICAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

Although fear and mistrust of the authorities are not unique to LGBT asylum seekers, the experience of anti-LGBT discrimination that many interviewees faced from the authorities in their home countries adds a further dimension to their distrust and even expectations of abuse from UK authorities. Several of the interviewees experienced torture and egregious abuse from the police and government organisations in their countries of origin and describe recurrent traumatic nightmares and memories of these events.

I claimed asylum because I have problems in my country and I was forced to flee because there was a big chance that they will kill me. In my culture it is not possible to be gay. I am a man and this is completely unacceptable. They hate us. I don't like to remember all this. I hate them for what they have done to me. I was arrested and beaten. One of them tried to rape me.

GAY MAN, COUNTRY AND AGE UNDISCLOSED

I'm lesbian I had a girl friend in [country undisclosed] and they arrested us. I was in prison and they did 100 lashes to me before I went to court.

LESBIAN, COUNTRY AND AGE UNDISCLOSED

Although torture and traumatic abuse is not unique to LGBT asylum seekers, the fact that many LGBT asylum seekers experienced torture and abuse in their home countries exclusively because of their sexuality or gender identity would indicate the likelihood that they continue to view their LGBT identity as a potential source of abuse from the authorities even in the UK. Torture or other abuse by security officials in their countries of origin has the potential for re-traumatisation through contact with police and security officials in the UK, as well as from harassment by housemates. This adds an additional and very deep source of mistrust and reluctance to report abuse or hate crime to the police and other authorities that is unique to LGBT asylum seekers.

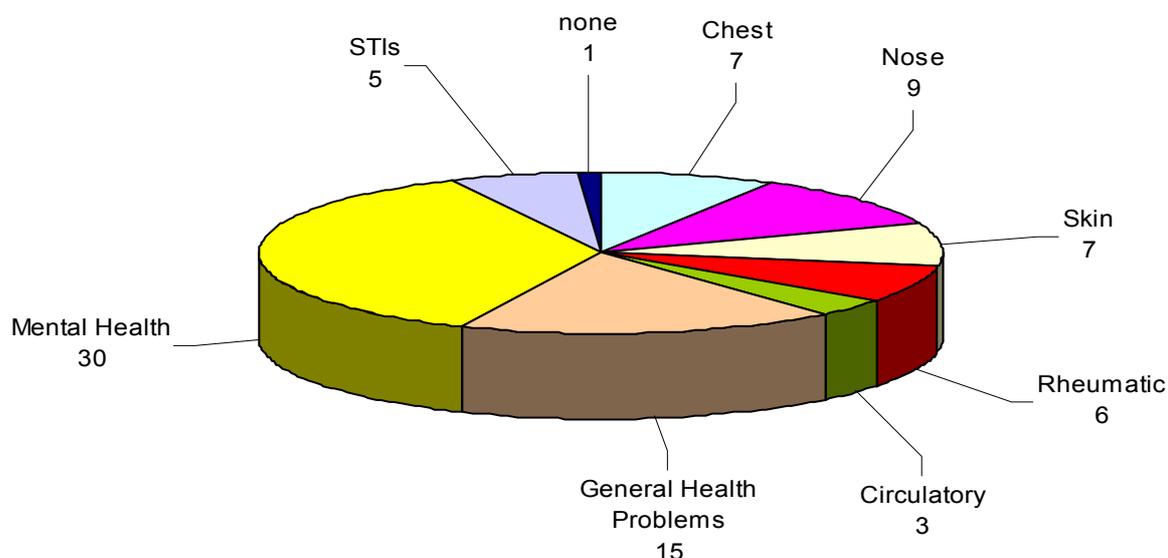
3.4.8. Key findings

- LGBT asylum seekers are exceptionally transient, often experiencing 'hidden homelessness' as they stay for short and indeterminate periods in the homes of friends and acquaintances.
- Most have experienced multiple forms of anti-LGBT discrimination, harassment and abuse and many fear disclosing their sexuality or gender identity and live 'double lives.'
- LGBT asylum seekers, especially in areas of dispersal, feel unsafe in the surrounding area and suffer anti-LGBT harassment from neighbours and local people.
- Gay men are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation as asylum seekers; some lesbian asylum seekers have experienced attempted rape in UKBA and shared accommodation.
- LGBT asylum seekers can face insecurity from slander and blackmail, in some cases losing sources of income or housing when their sexuality or gender identity is exposed.
- Many LGBT asylum seekers are especially mistrustful of the police and reluctant to report abuse; for some this is due to the experience of abuse or torture from authorities in their country of origin specifically because of their sexuality or gender identity.

3.5. Health issues

Two-thirds of interviewees described their health in the past year as good or fairly good, with the remaining one-third experiencing poor general health. 87.5 per cent were registered with GPs and were familiar with the services available through NHS. This was largely due to the fact that many LGBT asylum seekers who access services through specialist LGBT and BAME organisations are referred to GPs and encouraged to register with them.

Have You or Anyone in Household Suffered the Following in Past 12 Months?



The graph shows that for most interviewees or people in their household mental health problems had been an issue in the past year. Most respondents described their mental health problems as either anxiety or depression and attributed these conditions to their uncertain immigration status, financial insecurity, and accommodation problems.

3.5.1. Housing-related health issues

Several respondents attributed non-mental health issues to their material living conditions. These were usually described as breathing, rheumatic, or general health issues arising from poor heating, excessive dampness, and other accommodation-related causes that could be easily remedied under normal tenancy arrangements. The precarious nature of many respondents' informal living arrangements clearly affects their willingness or ability to demand housing repairs that could positively benefit their own health.

When you go to the corridor you can feel that the whole house is cold. [...] You never know how this weather is going to be. I feel like it's really affecting my health to be honest.
MALAWIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

Fifteen per cent of interviewees were either registered as disabled with Social Services or had someone in the household who was. Several listed physical disabilities and chronic long term illness.

The vast majority of interviewees went to their GP exclusively for help with their health problems. This indicates a high level of familiarity and comfort in accessing National Health Services for this sample group. Most described the service favourably, however respondents with more serious health issues were less satisfied with their GPs and the NHS.

I didn't go to the GP for nearly a year because they hesitate to even give a letter, a proper supporting letter that can help me. When I told them, any of those GPs I asked for a letter, I explained to them. First of all they don't have time to listen to you. They just want to get rid of you in one minute. Then I explained very briefly a couple of things, everything. They drop a line on the letter, which doesn't work and doesn't help at all. Then my GP, he charged me for a letter he was going to write. Some of the GPs charge you £10 or £15 for a letter. Imagine you only get £35 voucher, how do you want to provide £15 to give to your GP to have a proper letter which don't help you?

So it's really bad. You feel you can't do anything and there isn't anyone to help you.

IRANIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

Respondents were also asked about any issues they had with alcohol and drug misuse. Fifteen per cent indicated current problems with alcohol or substance misuse. Nearly half used alcohol and/or drugs socially or recreationally and did not consider this to be problematic.

These findings indicate a relatively low incidence of drug and alcohol misuse among the sample group. However, it is possible that cultural attitudes toward substance misuse, especially among interviewees from predominantly Muslim countries, may cause some interviewees to underreport drug or alcohol misuse out of shame or discomfort with the issues.

3.5.2. Exacerbation of health problems due to harassment within shared housing

Although most of the interviewees were in generally good health, it is apparent that homophobic and transphobic harassment in shared accommodation can dramatically affect the health and well-being of LGBT asylum seekers with existing chronic health conditions.

The following case study of one gay asylum seeker's experience powerfully demonstrates the link between homophobic discrimination in shared asylum support accommodation and deteriorating health conditions.

I had really bad health and that was about my accommodation. I have a liver condition, my liver got problems and in [country undisclosed] as well. For a while it was really bad. Basically your liver can not filter blood properly. I've got high, I think in English you call it 'enzyme,' it goes into your blood and your skin goes yellow and you feel really bad, sometimes your eyes go yellow. Sometimes people think it is like sign of hepatitis, but it isn't hepatitis. You look yellow, you feel bad but it's not hepatitis.

So I have to watch my diet, I have to avoid fatty food or processed food, ready food. But when they moved me from my single accommodation to the shared place I had to make my decision because in a few places that I was I didn't tell them I was gay. So I had to see,

watch them, sit with them, watching for example a TV programme about gay men. And they started saying such stupid stuff, homophobic stuff about gay men. And I had to involve with them, I had to be homophobic as well otherwise they would realise I am gay.

And then I thought no, neither, neither way is the solution. I've got to just go to my room and lock the door. And I was just eating canned and ready food because I didn't want to be standing with them just to cook in the kitchen. I was always eating in my room, locked in. It was really hard, really hard time. I felt really bad and depressed and really down.

It is interesting, just two weeks since we have moved here [into a new accommodation] and just yesterday I was in Refugee Council volunteering and people told me there, "You are looking better, you are looking healthier."

That was really bad, none of the housing provider, or Home Office, they didn't listen to me, they said "No, you are OK."

Q: *How long were you in that house?*

Over a year.

Q: *So the way you had to live, hiding your sexuality and going to your room, being worried about your flatmates, it made your liver condition get even worse?*

Yeah.

GAY MAN, COUNTRY AND AGE UNDISCLOSED

3.5.3. Mental health

The majority of interviewees described persistent anxiety and depression as their main health concern. Most attributed these to their uncertain immigration status and stresses induced by the UK asylum system. In this respect their mental health issues are probably shared by the general asylum seeking population in the UK.

I have mental problems. I have too much headache, Home Office give me too much headache. Too much stress, depression. I don't sleep, now I am taking sleeping tablets because I don't know what is happen, what is going on. Every week I am going to sign on, and every time my heart is beating because I think they will catch me and again put me in detention centre.

TRANSGENDER MALE, COUNTRY AND AGE UNDISCLOSED

Some respondents described their depression as arising directly from their housing situation and to the homophobic harassment they had to endure there.

I had really, really bad problems with depression during the last year of my life, in 2008. I just felt good for the time that I lived in that single accommodation. But as soon as they kicked me out from my single accommodation, and put me in the shared [UKBA] accommodation, I went down and down and down again. I have the feeling, depressed, down.

Q: So that good feeling was almost completely related to having your own accommodation?

Yeah, I even spoke to my doctor, asked for anti-depression. He said, "It's better if you don't take them because yours is not, its environmental depression. You need to improve your quality of life." Basically the accommodation.

IRANIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

Most of the respondents had sought help for depression and anxiety exclusively from their GP. However, most described receiving minimal service for depression-related issues and felt that GPs did not take them seriously. In many cases GPs told their clients that the depression was to be expected and that there was nothing that could be done about it. None of the respondents were referred to any counselling services by their GP. The preponderance of anxiety and depression among listed health problems indicates that there is a gap in service provision for the special needs of LGBT asylum seekers, especially as one-quarter of interviewees described having suicidal thoughts in the past year and two had attempted suicide during that period.

No I went a few times to my GP and my doctor said this is normal, for this situation I have here, to be stressed. I think anyone in my situation would think the same. I mean someone has to help us. To make us relaxed: "You're going to be alright, you're going to be ok!" We don't have any hope at the moment.

IRANIAN BISEXUAL MAN, 25-29 YEARS OLD

When I was suffering from depression I started losing hair from my face and my head. I contacted my GP and I told him that I have this problem, and he told me that was something natural, it happens because of the depression, and it will grow again by itself, don't worry about it. He told me that's something natural and it will grow by itself and I didn't go anywhere else.

IRAQI GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

Everybody has told GP about depression, but they ignore.

IRANIAN GAY MAN, 25-29 YEARS OLD

3.5.4. Key findings

- 87.5 per cent of LGBT asylum seekers are registered with General Practitioners and most utilise NHS services. This is more than the general asylum seeking population, a likely explanation is that most of the research sample were service users of LGBT and BAME

refugee community organisations who referred them to GPs and helped them access medical services.

- Anti-LGBT harassment in shared accommodations can severely exacerbate chronic health problems for some LGBT asylum seekers.
- Anxiety and depression are very prominent amongst the general asylum seeking problem and especially amongst LGBT asylum seekers. They receive a limited service from GPs regarding these issues and are not referred to counselling services.

3.6. Support networks

Perhaps the most salient findings of this research has been the discovery of the degree to which LGBT asylum seekers rely upon personal relationships, social networks in the absence of family and ethnic networks that other asylum seekers and migrants might traditionally rely upon.

3.6.1. Family

Family networks are very important sources of support for many asylum seekers and migrants. Many of the interviewees described feeling cut off from their families due to their homophobic and transphobic attitudes. For many, the initial choice to flee their home country was precipitated by the loss of family support when they first 'came out,' or of a fear of 'coming out' at all because of cultural discrimination against LGBT people in the family/community.

For me, I can't tell my cousins or someone who is a relative...because we grow up in the Middle East, so we still have their minds.

IRAQI GAY MAN, 25-29 YEARS OLD

About one third of the sample had not told some or all of their family members about their LGBT identity, and many of those who had told family members were presently estranged from them because of their disclosure.

Yes, they called me batty man, my parents gave me up when I was about 12-13 years to someone else because they realised I was gay.

JAMAICAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

My father don't know. My father used to say before I was out that he don't want any lesbian in his family. And he has passed away. My two brothers in Jamaica don't know and my two brothers in the UK know and don't talk to me because of it.

JAMAICAN LESBIAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

I have my sister here and she don't talk to me. She's been here for 16 years and she is British and we don't talk because I am gay.

CONGOLESE GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

The loss of vital family support networks explains the preponderance of reliance on friends, partners, and acquaintances for support and accommodation. For LGBT asylum seekers without partners and an established social network the additional lack of family support is a major factor in pushing them into destitution and homelessness.

3.6.2. National and ethnic communities

As with the general loss of family support networks, most of the sample group described feeling outcast or cut off from ethnic and national support networks. This represents another area of support that is commonly available to asylum seekers and migrants that is largely missing from LGBT asylum seekers' strategies for survival.

Half of the sample described avoiding social interaction with people from their own ethnic or national group.

I don't socialise with people from home because I will fall into the same problems as before. I socialise with Europeans more than any other race. I don't want more trouble from people so I stay with other races.

ARMENIAN GAY MAN, 25-29 YEARS OLD

I have nothing to do with them. I don't mix with people from my country. Basically because of my sexuality I don't want to mix. I don't know how they would react but I don't even want to try because I know that back home how they react so I don't want to mix with them.

CONGOLESE GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

I don't socialise with them because although I am Muslim I don't embrace them and the Pakistan culture. They look at me scornful.

PAKISTANI LESBIAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

Generally in a Jamaican community here if you're out on the street the amount of verbal abuse you get from them, it's horrible. You just have to not be around most of them. Some are ok, but most are not. Basically they see you as a threat.

JAMAICAN LESBIAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

With the Nigerian general community most of the time I am not welcome. I'm much more comfortable with white people than with black people.

NIGERIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

Of those who did socialise with people from their own ethnic or national group several added the qualification that they only did so with LGBT people from their own ethnic or national group. In

this sense support networks centred upon LGBT identity are a stronger source of friendship and support for LGBT asylum seekers than networks centred on purely national or ethnic identities.

I socialise with the gay community with my own background. They are very welcome me but some times I have to socialise with other people which some of them aren't nice to me.

IRAQI GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

The people I socialise with are a group of fellow gay friends from Nigeria. We all came down from Nigeria and know about each one being gay.

NIGERIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

Many respondents described tension arising from wanting to socialise with people from their own ethnic or national group but having fears about homophobic and transphobic sentiments common to those groups. These apprehensions were often mediated by finding people from the same ethnic and national groups through LGBT and asylum venues or organisations.

Not until I came to the monthly UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group meetings did I start to socialise with people from my own ethnic group because I always have problems with my own ethnic group. In fact I just started to socialise with them.

JAMAICAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

With UK Black Pride I can express myself openly with friends and have a good day out and when I think about Jamaica I know I can not do this at all.

JAMAICAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

3.6.3. Partners and friends

In light of the loss of familial, ethnic and national support networks for many LGBT asylum seekers it is not surprising that most of the sample relied heavily on friends, partners, and acquaintances for financial and emotional support and accommodation.

Nearly half of the sample group had what they described as long-term partners, and most of those who relied on their partners for income and accommodation. Not surprisingly, interviewees who lived with their partners faced less homophobic and transphobic discrimination in the home and described less involuntary mobility and homelessness.

I wasn't feeling secure in that [UKBA] accommodation and I had flat mates also and I had to hide my sexuality from my flatmate and the people just to be safe and be away from problems. [My partner] was coming every weekend and collecting me and taking me back and we decided to live together so we wanted that and we decided to live together. That's the reason I decided to move.

IRAQI GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

Most single respondents relied almost exclusively on friends and acquaintances for financial support and accommodation. In most cases these were other LGBT people and many had met each other through LGBT social networks, at LGBT venues and organisations or through LGBT internet groups.

Q: So how did you get in touch with the friends that you are living with?

Some on the gay sites. We met on gay sites and we became friends, some in parties and clubs. Gaydar, Gay Romeo, MayJam, Gumtree.

NIGERIAN GAY MAN, 18-24 YEARS OLD

London it is gay friendly in a way. My friends they are gay as well but they are not from my country. I just met them in a club, in a pub, so when I was sharing with them, some of them were telling me that they've been going through the same problems, so they really understand me, that's why they said, "OK, we can help."

MALAWIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

As described in section 3.4.5 however, reliance on friends and acquaintances, while offering a temporary safety net, often leaves LGBT asylum seekers in precarious situations and can contribute to increased mobility and periods of homelessness or hidden homelessness.

But been a group of friends that's the way they could help form some kind of chain and I jump from one person to the other. When this person gets enough of it then he will pass me to the next friend. Then he would pass me on to the next friend will accommodate for me and then pass me on to the next friend. And that's how it went.

KUWAITI GAY MAN, 25-29 YEARS OLD

If you're not going to work and you're not contributing anything they can't take it forever. They had their own problems or maybe they want their privacy, they would come up with excuses to get rid of you.

MALAWIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

3.6.4. Refugee organisations

Many respondents have utilised services from organisations that deal exclusively with asylum seekers and refugees. Refugee Council was the most commonly utilised organisation and many interviewees had used their services either independently or as part of UKBA asylum support accommodation processes. Refugee Council's London office does not produce statistics on how many asylum seekers contact them for UKBA asylum support issues, but their 'One Stop' service for advice held 15,000 advice sessions in 2005-06 specifically on UKBA queries, welfare entitlements, and training and employment opportunities.

For several of the respondents in UKBA asylum support accommodation Refugee Council is the organisation to which they address requests and complaints regarding their accommodation.

Refugee Council, sometimes I complain to them. Sometimes [property management company].

Q: So Refugee Council is in charge of giving you the flat?

No. If you have any problem, you cannot contact [property management company] or NASS or Home Office. You have to go to Refugee Council and they help you about house or everything.

Q: So they tell you how to get things fixed and all that?

Yeah exactly.

IRANIAN GAY MAN, 25-29 YEARS OLD

When I wanted to move with my partner I applied for that through Scottish Refugee Council and they did that for me, they sent a letter to the Home Office.

Q: So Scottish Refugee Council helped you leave the UKBA accommodation to live with your partner?

Yeah, because I asked to the Home Office and they said, "You have to go to the Scottish Refugee Council and apply for that." So I went there and told that and somebody came to interview me and asked me, "What's your problem?" and told me you have to bring a confirming letter from your partner that he accepts you to live with him and proof of address. So I took that from my partner and gave to the Scottish Refugee Council and they fill a form and send a letter to the Home Office about that.

IRAQI GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

Other organisations that interviewees had utilised included the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, the Helen Bamber Foundation, the Red Cross, Age Concern and Kids Company. These organisations were commonly utilised for legal, medical, or medico-legal advice services.

Not all respondents felt comfortable disclosing their LGBT identities when dealing with refugee and other community service organisations. Those who did disclose their LGBT identities described a mixture of positive and negative reactions.

But the Red Cross, they know about my sexuality and they treat me quite well.
IRANIAN GAY MAN, 25-29 YEARS OLD

By and large most of the sample group were service users of organisations that dealt exclusively with LGBT asylum seekers or LGBT BAME groups and so the role of exclusively LGBT-oriented asylum seeker organisations will be dealt with separately. This indicates that LGBT asylum seekers are underserved by mainstream refugee organisations. This research shows that LGBT identity precludes many LGBT asylum seekers from seeking advice and services from some of the mainstream refugee and asylum seeker organisations. This appears to be due to a lack of training, understanding, or empathy from staff in some mainstream refugee organisations that interviewees have described.

I went to [refugee support organisation in south London] and she said, “You are not a needy person, go with your friend.” And she is not a helpful person, not that polite, and they are thinking, “We do not need to have any respect.”
TRANSGENDER MALE, COUNTRY AND AGE UNDISCLOSED

None of the interviewees specifically mentioned Refugee Support. However, as one of the UK’s leading providers of housing and support for refugees and asylum seekers and the brand name for Metropolitan Support Trust’s specialist refugee and asylum seeker services, Refugee Support is specially positioned to deal with the unique needs and concerns of LGBT asylum seekers. It is clear that Refugee Support, especially through working in partnership with the organisations that serve predominantly LGBT asylum seekers, can enhance its service provision and support to further assist LGBT asylum seekers.

3.6.5. LGBT and BAME Organisations

The vast majority of the interviewees were service users of third sector organisations dealing with LGBT asylum seekers or LGBT BAME communities. This is because nearly all interviewees were recruited through service providers.

These organisations included: UK Gay and Lesbian Immigration Group, UK Black Pride, Imaan, and Naz Project London. Among this sample group reliance on LGBT and BAME organisations and LGBT activist networks are a major source of support and guidance.

They helped me to find a good solicitor based on my sexuality and help to meet other gay people or any other organisation group to socialise.
GAY MALE IRAQI, 30-44 YEARS OLD

They are very friendly and welcoming. They helped me to get solicitor I am happy to go there I don't get financial help but they help to meet other gay people and immigration things.

PAKISTANI LESBIAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

Many also attend LGBT community events such as PRIDE, Black PRIDE, and activist events. Several interviewees volunteer for LGBT organisations and explained that this provides meaningful activity in the absence of legal paid employment.

During PRIDE I distribute leaflets about the Metropolitan Community Church, and I go to a gay swimming group. I was taking part in the competitions and quite a lot of things. Things happen in the gay groups, they all need help. I am always up to helping. [...] I feel I'm giving, putting something in it and it gives me satisfaction. It makes me feel useful and like I'm doing something.

IRANIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

These positive attitudes toward LGBT organisations were not unanimous however, as some respondents described their fears that prevented them from accessing services offered by LGBT organisations.

I don't like to go anywhere else because when I was in Iran I thought if I come here I can be open but here it's the same. Nobody respects you being gay and even I don't feel comfortable in [Refugee Community Organisation that specialises in LGBT service users].
IRANIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

However the prevalence of positive descriptions of LGBT or LGBT BAME organisations indicates that these organisations provide vital services for LGBT asylum seekers that are not provided by mainstream refugee and asylum seeker organisations.

3.6.6. LGBT commercial scene

All of the respondents indicated that they frequent commercial LGBT venues (clubs, bars). More than half of the sample group went to commercial LGBT venues on average more than once a month. Most described their experiences in LGBT clubs and bars in positive terms and felt they were good venues for recreation and socialising with other LGBT people.

For the majority of the sample group financial difficulties were the main barrier to utilising the LGBT commercial scene more often. One third described being made to feel unwelcome at times in LGBT clubs and bars and feeling that they stood out because of their ethnic and racial appearance. Being treated like a 'novelty', language barriers, having no one to go with, and an aversion to seeing recreational drug use were additional barriers for several interviewees.

As described in section 3.4.5 several respondents had suffered sexual exploitation in LGBT clubs and bars. Additionally, several interviewees described racist attitudes in LGBT commercial venues, although this appeared to have a higher prevalence outside of London.

Yeah, there is this gay pub in Leeds and, I don't know, maybe they need to be told or something because they don't feel comfortable with black men.

MALAWIAN GAY MAN, 30-44 YEARS OLD

The experience of sexual exploitation and racist discrimination for some interviewees highlights the limits of the commercial LGBT scene as a place where meaningful relationships and support can be found. This finding is corroborated by research into LGBT migrants in the UK.¹⁰

However some LGBT asylum seekers who have claimed asylum on the grounds of sexuality or gender identification feel it is necessary to frequent LGBT social venues in order to 'be seen' on the LGBT social scene. In some cases refugee organisations dealing with LGBT asylum seekers advise their clients to frequent LGBT social venues because it can aid asylum cases based on sexuality by establishing the asylum seeker's sexual identity in a public manner that can be referenced in legal proceedings.

3.6.7. Key findings

- Many LGBT asylum seekers have lost family support due to their sexuality or gender identity.
- Similarly, most cannot rely on their respective national or ethnic communities for support because they fear anti-LGBT reprisals from them.
- LGBT asylum seekers construct their own support networks comprising friends and acquaintances, mostly met through LGBT social networks.
- LGBT and BAME organisations fulfil vital service provision and support functions for LGBT asylum seekers that are not available from other refugee support organisations and refugee community organisations.
- The commercial LGBT scene offers a welcome source of recreation for many LGBT asylum seekers, and a means of fashioning social support networks; however some LGBT asylum seekers experience exploitation in those settings.

¹⁰Sigma Research (2004c). *Ethnic Minority Gay Men: Redefining Community, Restoring Identity*.

4. Stakeholder responses

4.1. Overview

Service providers, commissioners and other stakeholders were invited to a Cooperative Enquiry Workshop to discuss the emerging findings and assist in the identification of recommendations. Participants who attended are listed in section 7.2.

In addition, a small number of other stakeholders were invited to contribute their views through interviews or informal discussions. Stakeholders participating in this phase of the research are listed in section 7.3.

4.2. Raising awareness of LGBT issues

Stakeholders broadly welcomed the emerging findings presented at the co-operative enquiry workshop. They were very supportive of RS/ MST's decision to commission research into what all viewed as a neglected area. Stakeholders shared the concern that there was very little research into the issues relating to LGBT asylum seekers.

Practice example

Refugee Action reported that they now provided training on LGBT issues for staff as part of its diversity training programme, but that this remained optional. The training was based upon a cascade model with the focus on training project managers first. Staff surveys indicated that 15% of Refugee Action's staff were LGBT, which gave the issue some prominence. However, there was still some resistance from project managers regarding LGBT issues and awareness raising. It was hoped that research reports such as this would encourage the organisations to fully embed LGBT issues with their general equalities training.

Website: <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/>

Stakeholders felt that another key issue was the lack of understanding about what was happening in asylum seekers home countries in relation to LGBT issues. This was in contrast to a greater understanding of the drivers for asylum seekers leaving countries in conflict etc. Raising awareness of why LGBT asylum seekers come to the UK may assist in people developing more responsive services.

Practice example

UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group provides training for community groups to raise awareness of the specific issues faced by LGBT asylum seekers that are different from those faced by others seeking asylum in the UK and to assist groups to better support LGBT asylum seekers.

The training varies according to what group it is provided for but covers:

- What is sexual identity?
- What are the issues faced by lesbian and gay asylum seekers in their home countries?
- Why are lesbian and gay asylum seekers refused asylum in the UK?
- What are the specific issues faced by lesbian and gay asylum seekers when they claim asylum in the UK?
- The role of voluntary and community groups in supporting lesbian and gay asylum seekers.

A number of community groups have attended this training including, British Red Cross Society, Immigration Advisory Service, London Detainee Support Group, Médecins du Monde, Naz Project, Refugee Action, Refugee Council, Sexuality, Somali Gay Community, Southwark Human Rights Race and Equalities Bureau, Terrence Higgins Trust and UKBA Country of Origin Information Service. The group is in discussion with the Home Office about providing this training on an ongoing basis to case workers.

Website: <http://www.uklgig.org.uk/>

4.3. Improving data collection on LGBT asylum seekers

Stakeholders felt that in the absence of systematic data gathering on the sexuality of asylum seekers the estimates provided in this report provided a good starting point, however some were concerned that as sexuality was a major driver for individuals to seek asylum the figures could significantly under-estimate the number of LGBT claiming asylum.

Estimating the numbers of transgendered asylum seekers presented even greater challenges as there are no UK based figures on which to base assumptions. Instead researchers have calculated the number of transgendered asylum seekers as around 2% of the total number of LGBT asylum seekers. This assumption is based on the proportion of UKLGIG's case load who identify as transgender.

As previously noted the need for more accurate figures was considered as a major reason why many commissioners and service providers feel they can ignore the needs of LGBT asylum seekers.

Clearly the Home Office could provide a significant lead in this area. Whilst it does not monitor

sexuality it does gather information on the reason for an asylum claim. Unfortunately this information is currently neither collated nor published.

Stakeholders were also critical of other agencies working with asylum seekers who were reluctant to address issues of sexuality amongst their service users. For example, Michael Murray the London Regional Manager for Advice^{UK} reported:

AdviceUK manages the London Councils BME Access Improvement Project, a partnership project of 19 BME Advice Network members. AdviceUK has arranged for the common case management system, AdvicePro, to allow recording of sexuality, but the project is experiencing reluctance by some migrant and refugee community organisations to ask service users about their sexuality.

He went on to reinforce a point made by many stakeholders at the reluctance of funders to address this area:

Encouraging migrant and refugee community organisations and mainstream providers to ask and record sexuality will likely only happen in earnest once funders make it a requirement, and take action against those organisations that fail to do so. London Councils requests information on gender identity and sexuality, so hopefully some change will start to happen, but I think it will take a lot of pushing to change engrained behaviour.

4.4. Accessing legal advice

Stakeholders corroborated LGBT asylum seekers views regarding accessing appropriate legal advice. Good immigration advice was difficult to access for many asylum seekers, and specialist support where the lawyer or adviser had a knowledge of LGBT issues, often crucial to an individual's case was even harder to find, particularly outside London. The high levels of mobility reported by LGBT asylum seekers compounds this issue. Concerns were also raised that there is not a list of LGBT country experts for asylum representation and tribunal work.

There was some debate as to whether existing providers should be made less homophobic, or whether it was better to invest in specialist services. It was concluded that both approaches were required. However, Michael Murray from Advice^{UK} reported:

It will be very difficult to get LGBT specific specialist immigration contracts from the Legal Services Commission from 2010 onwards. Early indications are that all equalities related access will need to go through mainstream providers. For example, Disability Law Service is being told that disabled people are unlikely to get their own contract, that mainstream providers will need to make their services accessible to all equalities groups. This suggests that there will also be issues with LGBT asylum services. It is possible that

UKLGIG might win a contract for 2010, but it is more likely that larger contracts such as Refugee Migrant Justice (formerly RLC) or IAS will bid to offer services to LGBT clients as well. The best chance of ensuring that the LGBT community get enough access to legal aid may be to ensure that RMJ and IAS offer slots for LGBT specific service users, or make their caseworkers/solicitors go through LGBT awareness training.

Stakeholders did report some positive practice, with the Immigration Law Practitioners Association (ILPA) offering some training to solicitors on LGBT issues. Additionally, the UK Gay and Lesbian Immigration Group (UKLGIG) provide training to immigration solicitors and legal advisers.

Practice example

UKLGIG also provides training to immigration solicitors and legal advisers to enable them to make the best possible application for asylum on the grounds of sexual and gender identity.

The training covers:

- How is the refugee definition applied to sexual and gender identity claims?
- What is the appropriate Convention ground?
- What types of 'harm' amount to State persecution and non-State persecution.
- How to establish that the fear is well-founded
- How could Article 3 or 8 of the ECHR help your client?
- What is Home Office policy and practice?
- An analysis and summary of key cases dealing with LGBT asylum issues.
- Practical tips on preparing an application and an appeal including issues of credibility, proving sexual identity, relationships, how to demonstrate that it is no answer to expect your client to act discreetly or relocate internally, persecution, prosecution and protection.

Website: <http://www.uklgig.org.uk/>

Practice example

Advice^{UK} has applied for a grant from Awards for All to run training and 1-2-1 support sessions for mainstream MRCOs and advice providers. The project, if successful, will improve the ability of BAME advice providers in London to serve clients from LGBT communities. This will be achieved through training for advisers and manager, provided by Stonewall Housing. Core elements of the training will cover legislative frameworks for civic partnerships and housing, and domestic violence; and presentations summarizing main housing issues for LGBT clients covering young people, older people, homophobic harassment and violence, and same sex domestic abuse. In addition, courses focusing on managers will cover policy implications of providing accessible services to LGBT clients. Case worker modules will include training on how to ask questions about client sexuality and why these questions are relevant. In addition, the project will provide LGBT Friendly posters to participating organisations, a good practice policy and procedure guide, and one-to-one half day support for 8 organisations to help them attain LGBT Friendly status. Although focused on MRCOs, the training will also be offered to mainstream advice agencies and law centres. They will know if this grant application has been successful in April 2009.

Website: <http://www.adviceuk.org.uk/>

4.5. Concerns with Home Office/UKBA

Stakeholders reflected a wide range of concerns with the Home Office and UKBA. They felt that policy was relatively progressive in relation to LGBT issues but this was not reflected in procedures. In particular stakeholders noted:

- A need for more training for caseworkers and all staff throughout the system from judges to detention staff.
- That detention centre staff training is contracted out and the Home Office should be encouraged to explore contract compliance in relation to LGBT and other diversity training.
- That current 'best practice' within detention centres seems to be the isolation of LGBT asylum seekers when victimised rather than tackling the perpetrator.
- That the Home Office needs to produce clearer guidance on claiming asylum based on sexuality.
- That for LGBT people, dispersal decisions should not be based on nationality but to LGBT-friendly areas.
- That UKBA needs to consider whether they should extend their definition of vulnerability to include sexuality in considering asylum seekers requests to be moved.

4.6. Accommodation

Stakeholders felt that LGBT asylum seekers housing conditions were worse than for other groups of asylum seekers. They felt that many of the problems faced by LGBT asylum seekers could be addressed at limited or no cost. For UKBA accommodation they suggested that:

- UKBA needs a contract condition with accommodation providers in relation to LGBT asylum seekers. This would require all providers to ensure their staff get LGBT asylum equalities training.
- Provision could also be made for direct contracts with a limited number of LGBT housing providers or encouraging sub-contracting of housing management to LGBT organisations by main accommodation contract holders.
- UKBA should introduce better monitoring of housing providers in relation to LGBT issues and establish clear avenues for complaint.

Stakeholders suggested that if these systems were introduced by UKBA there would be a consistency of service and monitoring across UKBA, Section 4, and Local Authorities.

LGBT asylum seekers could also be supported through better pan-London coordination to share the burden of asylum seekers between authorities and the Mayor of London could take a lead in this area.

Practice example

At the heart of **Stonewall Housing's** work, since they started in 1983, is the aim to find safe and secure homes for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. They provide supported accommodation for LGBT people, aged between 16 and 25, in six LGBT-specific houses in London and housing advice and advocacy to LGBT people of all ages through a telephone helpline and weekly drop-in surgeries.

As well as aiming to meet the housing needs of LGBT people themselves, Stonewall Housing also influences housing policy and practice at local, regional and national level and provides training and consultancy services to other housing organisations in order to raise awareness of the housing needs of the LGBT communities. Their LGBT Awareness Programme has been devised specifically for housing providers and incorporates staff training, consultation exercises and rigorous policy reviews to ensure they are progressive and welcoming organisations which embrace diversity and do not tolerate homophobia, bi-phobia or trans-phobia.

Website: <http://www.stonewallhousing.org/home.html>

4.7. Safety

Whilst many interviewees had experienced considerable problems regarding their personal safety in the past, for most interviewees their current safety was not a major concern.

Deborah Gold, Chief Executive of GALOP (the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Anti-violence and Policing Group) noted:

Our experience with refugees and asylum seekers is two-fold: 1) They may be fearful of reporting any incidents if they are asylum seekers because they are afraid of negatively impacting on their asylum claim and 2) They may not identify their experiences of hate crime in this way because the violence they are fleeing can seem so much worse that it doesn't register as something that should be reported.

Alongside raising the awareness of LGBT asylum seekers about what hate crime is so that they can realise that abuse is not something they need to tolerate, stakeholders felt that more work should be done to make it easier to report such offences. In particular expanding the network of third party reporting centres to include organisations such as UKLGIG.

Stakeholders felt that location matters: neighbourhood discrimination must be considered in the provision of accommodation for LGBT asylum seekers. There were some concerns as to whether it would be good idea to group LGBT asylum seekers together and whether this might make them a more visible target.

4.8. Exploitation

In the absence of other support, stakeholders felt that LGBT asylum seekers would continue to be dependent upon the support from casual friends and acquaintances. Young gay men and transgender people were considered to be more at risk of sexual exploitation than lesbians. Of the very small number of LGBT asylum seekers involved in sex work there was evidence that financial desperation forced them to participate in unsafe sex which commanded a higher price.

Stakeholders were aware that in the past the Home Office had used the Refugee Challenge Fund and European Refugee Fund to support initiatives that worked with male and transgender sex workers¹¹ (although these were targeted at refugees and not asylum seekers). No current initiatives of this type were noted and it was felt that this may be an area where future funding should be directed.

¹¹ For example in 2005 Home Office funding was provided to Streetwise Youth, the charity for male and transgender sex workers now part of the Terrence Higgins.

4.9. Health

Stakeholders were pleased to note the high levels of registration with general practitioners and felt that this may reflect the high priority given to this by service providers in recent years. For most LGBT asylum seekers interviewed, their general health was good but there were some individuals experiencing acute problems that were exacerbated by their accommodation or general living arrangements.

Stakeholders noted that mental health problems were common in all asylum seekers, noting that lesbians are particularly vulnerable to mental ill health.

Whilst access to primary health care appeared good, access to secondary health care was normally denied to asylum seekers. Gemma Juma at the Refugee Council noted that referral to counselling and other psychological therapies was a major issue for their asylum seeking clients.

There was evidence that some young men were putting themselves at risk of HIV. But for the majority of interviewees HIV did not present itself as a major health issue. Stakeholders felt that HIV was likely to be an issue for some LGBT asylum seekers and that problems about accessing appropriate care were likely to be an issue.

4.10. Support

The reports conclusion in relation to the double exclusion of LGBT asylum seekers from traditional refugee support organisations on the one hand and mainstream LGBT organisations on the other was felt to be largely accurate. However, it was noted that LGBT organisations whilst not yet providing “asylum-friendly” services are showing a willingness to develop accessible services for this group.

The key issue for stakeholders is to raise awareness of the needs of LGBT asylum seekers with both LGBT groups and with organisations working with refugees. There was a strong feeling that LGBT issues should be included as a mandatory part of general diversity training for refugee organisations. A number of stakeholders also identified the role of funders in encouraging and incentivising refugee community organisations to embrace this issue (and the use of funding sanctions if they failed to do so).

The role of small specialist groups working with LGBT asylum seekers, particularly self-help groups was highly regarded. It was felt that funders should seek out such groups and provide them with modest funds in order to better publicise their services.

Practice example

Since 1993 **UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group** has been supporting lesbians and gay men to gain fair and equal treatment in immigration law. In 2005 the group's focus shifted to those who, persecuted in their home countries because of their sexuality, have escaped to the UK. There is currently no other dedicated organisation tackling the multifaceted problems faced by LGBT asylum seekers in the UK.

LGBT asylum seekers receive direct support from the group through legal advice, assistance to find expert representation, provision of research to support asylum claims and the provision of a safe environment for mutual support. The group provides a telephone helpline each weekday and holds monthly meetings where asylum seekers meet with others in a similar situation and with sympathetic, experienced volunteer lawyers and interpreters.

UKLGIG operates a rota of legal aid solicitors with the necessary experience, who volunteer their time to assess cases and who take referrals. This referral system is providing a crucial lifeline to people, some of whom would otherwise be deported from the UK. Additionally, UKLGIG volunteers carry out research on specific countries to support claims.

Website: <http://www.uklgig.org.uk/>

Practice example

Iraqi LGBT supports LGBT activists in Iraq in order to assist their efforts to help other Lesbians, Gay, Bisexuals and Transgender Iraqis facing death, persecution and systematic targeting by the Iraqi Police and Badr and Sadr Militias and to raise awareness about the wave of homophobic murders in Iraq to the outside world.

Iraqi LGBT raises funds to help provide LGBTs under threat of killing with refuge in the safer parts of Iraq (including safe houses, food, electricity, medical help) and assists efforts help them seek refuge in neighbouring countries.

Website: <http://iraqilgbtuk.blogspot.com/>

Practice example

Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST) is an association of women asylum seekers that seeks to share experience, empower and supporting women asylum seekers, fight for rights, raise awareness about the issues that force women to seek international protection and the effects of the injustices of the UK immigration system. WAST achieves these goals by:

- Providing a safe and secure women only space and a source of support for each other, social and emotional.
- Empowerment for one another, sharing knowledge and information, skills and experiences.
- Helping each other take forward our asylum applications and run campaigns.
- Promoting and improving our skills and experience.
- Involving ourselves in organisational and community development activities and networking with other groups.
- Raising awareness and lobbying on Women's Asylum issues.
- Promoting a positive image of asylum seekers.

Website: <http://www.wast.org.uk/>

Practice example

UK Black Pride is organisation created to promote unity among Black people of African, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Latin American decent who identify as Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender. The organisation is committed the following goals:

- The Official Annual UK Black Pride Event - to ensure that the annual UK Black Pride festival event will be an inclusive event and we will ensure that they work together with all sections of the UK's culturally diverse BME LGBT community.
- Social Networking – to hold social events to relax meet and socialise in an informal setting, while also supporting members of our community to network and develop social support.
- Community Outreach – to look at resources available within UKBP to support and give back to the community.
- Advocacy - to raise awareness around the experiences of UK's BME LGBT community and advocate and make contributions to the general community from a BME LGBT perspective.
- Growth –UK Black Pride is an organisation that fosters a positive ethos to ensure that BME LGBT talent and achievements are promoted. UK Black Pride seeks to accomplish this vision and in doing so will also attract others who see and want to be a part of this vision

Website: <http://www.ukblackpride.org.uk/>

4.11. Commercial scene

The negative experiences for many LGBT asylum seekers in accessing the commercial gay scene was reinforced by comments from stakeholders. There were some concerns by stakeholders that this research should not promote the use of commercial venues as this might expose people to drink and drugs unnecessarily. However, Erin Power from UKLGIG noted that improving access to the commercial scene should be a priority as being involved in and using the gay scene was often powerful evidence in asylum claims based upon sexuality.

Stakeholders felt that LGBT groups had a role in raising the awareness amongst owners of venues and clubs regarding LGBT asylum seekers and that owners could be encouraged to provide free social evenings for asylum seekers.

Stakeholders were also pleased to note that LGBT asylum seekers were keen to volunteer in a range of services. They could be particularly useful at raising awareness of LGBT asylum issues

within mainstream LGBT groups and refugee organisations. UKLGIG noted that lesbians were particularly keen on volunteering and, in spite of their low numbers in terms of service users, around 90% of UKLGIG volunteers are lesbian.

4.12. Other issues

Stakeholders raised a number of other issues. The researchers raised some concerns that the interview sample did not include older LGBT asylum seekers. Stakeholders felt that the demographic profile of interviewees reflected those of their own service users and that there are fewer if any older LGBT people claiming asylum.

There were also concerns that the sample did not include some of the most vulnerable individuals, particularly those LGBT asylum seekers who are not in touch with services. However, all of those interviewed had described what life was like before they had accessed help with service providers. Erin Power from UKLGIG noted that many LGBT asylum seekers who came to her for advice prior to registering their asylum claim were outside the system and homeless *because* they are LGBT and as such are terrified of going through the system and the inevitability of being detained.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1. Overview

This report has reaffirmed the view of RS/MST that, to date, there has been little research into issues relating to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender asylum seekers. It provides the first substantial insight into their lives and experiences, but should only be seen as a starting point for further study rather than a comprehensive picture of their background, lives, needs and aspirations. In line with the research brief, its focus is primarily on housing issues, however, some of the information included addresses the interrelated relationship between housing and health, safety, legal advice, support networks etc.

Little is known about the total number of LGBT asylum seekers currently in the country or those arriving each month. Whilst this report includes a conservative estimation of numbers, these numbers are no substitute for the systematic gathering of data. Researchers have provided an even more cautious estimate of the number of transgender asylum seekers, and whilst numbers may be small, these individuals have a range of unmet needs that are exacerbated by their transgender identity.

In many other research reports the experience of all asylum seekers reflects what has been termed “rough justice”. Access to legal advice can be problematic, the quality of accommodation poor with the experience of detention and/or dispersal uncomfortable and challenging. These findings suggest that LGBT asylum seekers not only experience these problems, but their sexuality or gender identity can add significantly to the problems they face adding layers of multiple disadvantage arguably more acute than for other asylum seekers.

For many asylum seekers there are now a rich variety of support organisations particularly in the voluntary and community sectors in all parts of the country. Although these services may be under-resourced, they provide a warm and welcoming environment for asylum seekers and are a vital lifeline for many. LGBT asylum seekers too often feel excluded from such services and fear (or experience) discrimination and harassment from their own ethnic and national communities, adding to the challenges they face. RCOs, in particular can perpetuate negative attitudes from their home countries to LGBT asylum seekers. Faith based organisations; both Christian and Muslim may also perpetuate these negative attitudes and prejudices. For refugee support organisations it is sometimes assumed that LGBT issues are marginal given their lack of data on numbers of LGBT service users.

Similarly, families and kinship networks can often be great sources of support and comfort for many asylum seekers as they can counter the social isolation of dispersal and also often a key resource in the provision of accommodation and other material support. But too often, for LGBT asylum seekers, these networks are hostile to issues relating to sexuality or transgender identity, further adding to a sense of isolation and a lack of support.

This study indicates that LGBT asylum seekers have initially sought assistance from larger generic LGBT community organisations and most have had some access to the commercial LGBT sector. The experience of LGBT asylum seekers at the hands of LGBT organisations has not always been welcoming and their experience of the commercial sector has often been one of exclusion because of their lack of finances and the sometimes racist attitudes of people who frequent them. Support has instead come from relatively new and under or un-resourced organisations who combine a focus on LGBT *and* asylum or ethnic identity issues. Most, although not all, of these groups are in London making access hugely problematic for many asylum seekers who are dispersed to parts of the country where no such groups exist. Even within London, because such groups are generally under or un-resourced, knowledge of them comes by word of mouth and many interviewees spent considerable amounts of time isolated and unsupported before finding these groups.

Such exclusion and isolation inevitably increases the vulnerability of LGBT asylum seekers with many dependent upon the kindness of strangers and casual acquaintances. Young men appeared to be particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation from casual friends and with some engaging in sex work as a means of survival.

The following sections summarise the key findings and provide recommendations for changes to policy and practice that may alleviate the specific hardship suffered by LGBT asylum seekers.

5.2. Key issues

This section highlights key issues for consideration by stakeholders based upon the testimony of individual LGBT asylum seekers and includes recommendations made by specific stakeholders in the final section.

5.2.1. Estimating numbers

Too little is known about the numbers or profile of LGBT asylum seekers in the UK. Using standard government approaches to the UK population it is estimated that somewhere in the region of 1,200 and 1,800 lesbian, gay and bisexual asylum seekers arrived in the UK in 2008.¹² This is equivalent to 100 to 150 lesbian, gay and bisexual asylum seekers each month. There are no recognised methods of calculating the size of the Transgendered population, however, the report provides a crude estimate that the numbers of transgendered people arriving each month is 2 -3, or around 20 to 30 per year. This approach will undoubtedly significantly under-estimate the numbers of LGBT asylum seekers arriving in the UK.

The UKBA does not gather statistics on sexual orientation at asylum screening interviews and

¹² The government estimates that 5-7% of the general population are lesbian, gay, or bisexual in: *Civil Partnership: a framework for the legal recognition of same-sex couples*. London: Women and Equality Unit, June 2003.

does not collate information on claims for asylum based on sexual orientation or transgender identity. Whilst we appreciate the constraints on monitoring for sexuality in refugee support and refugee community organisations the absence of data may add to the marginalisation of these communities.

These approaches will under-estimate the numbers of LGBT asylum seekers arriving in the UK. This identifies the legal and social status of LGBT people in a number of countries generating significant numbers of asylum claims and identify that in many of these places LGBT people are likely to suffer significant legal and/or social sanction, up to and including death. In this context it may be reasonable to assume that sexuality or transgender identity will be a significant driver and therefore increase the proportion of LGBT people in the overall asylum seeker population.

There are undoubtedly constraints on monitoring for sexuality in refugee support and refugee community organisations. Many LGBT asylum seekers are reluctant to reveal their sexual identities in such settings. Mainstream LGBT community organisations may be in a better position to assess the asylum status of their service users. However, individuals may be reluctant to reveal their asylum status in such settings as this may deny them access to services. In both refugee and LGBT organisations it would be useful to begin to collect such statistics, in part to improve data, but also to begin to “normalise” the issues of LGBT status in refugee organisations and asylum status in LGBT organisations. Section 5.2.10 makes further recommendations in relation to refugee organisations and LGBT organisations.

- R1 The Home Office should collate and publish data on the number, chosen gender, age and country of origin of those claiming asylum on the basis of sexuality or gender identity.**
- R2 The UKBA should add questions on sexuality and gender identity to their screening interviews. The monitoring categories developed for this work should be replicated with housing and other service providers to ensure the comparability of data.**
- R3 The Home Office should ensure that data gathered on sexuality and gender identity by country of origin is made available to their colleagues in the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO). This data should be used by the FCO in developing its country human rights profiles and in informing the ethical dimension to foreign policy. As with other areas of human rights in developing countries, this data should be used to inform government aid policy through the Department for International Development (DfID) and its agencies.**

5.2.2. Securing appropriate advice and legal support for LGBT asylum seekers

As with most asylum seekers one of the most pressing issues is the resolution of their asylum claim. In the majority of cases our respondents had identified their sexuality as the main basis of their asylum claim. Amongst current interviewees access to appropriate legal advice had been possible (largely through UKLGIG). However, the resources of UKLGIG are limited. The Immigration Law Practitioners' Group (ILPA) does provide training for lawyers on working with LGBT related asylum claims and Advice^{UK}, the UK's largest network of not-for-profit legal and advice centres, is currently seeking funding to develop a project to train 120 advisers.

The majority of legal advice to asylum seekers is funded by the Legal Service Commission (LSC). Consultation on the specification for contracts from 2010 onwards has now closed. Current indications are that this is likely to see a further concentration of legally aided immigration advice in a smaller number of large non-specialist providers. However, the LSC will need to undertake an Equalities Impact Assessment of any changes to the specification which provides a further opportunity to influence future commissioning of services in this area.

R4 Accessibility to specialist immigration advice for LGBT asylum seekers needs to be expanded. To achieve this:

- **Further support should be provided to specialist providers such as the UK Lesbian & Gay Immigration Group (UKLGIG)**
- **In developing the commissioning strategy and the detailed specification for contracts for generic immigration legal advisers working with LGBT asylum seekers the Legal Service Commission should include requirements in relation to providers' undertaking appropriate training in sexuality and gender identity issues such as that provided by the Immigration Law Practitioners' Group (ILPA) or that proposed by Advice^{UK}. Training requirements should not only include legal advisers but other staff involved in the legal process, including interpreters.**
- **National providers such as the Immigration Advisory Service and Refugee Legal Centre should establish referral protocols with and commission training support from specialist providers such as UKLGIG to ensure access to appropriate and sensitive legal advice.**

5.2.3. The Home Office attitude to LGBT asylum claims

As noted, no data is collated or published nationally on the numbers of claims from LGBT asylum seekers or the percentage granted asylum on the basis of sexuality. A number of interviewees in

this research came from so-called “white list” countries.¹³ Whilst the Home Office does not operate a formal “white list” the 2002 Nationality, Immigration & Asylum Act does not make provision for maintenance of a list of countries to be “designated for non-suspensive appeals”. There are countries that the Home Office deem as broadly safe even though anecdotal evidence and our interviewees’ testimonies describe cultures of extreme anti-LGBT prejudice. In the Autumn of 2008 the Home Office undertook an analysis of the coverage of LGBT issues through the Advisory Panel on Country Information (APCI)¹⁴ and is currently implementing the findings from this report.

R5 The Home Office should continue to develop its country of origin information reports to improve reporting on the social sanctions as well as any legal sanctions against LGBT people in line with the APCI report. The Home Office should assure itself that it has sufficient experts to advise on the situation facing LGBT people in countries of origin and expand its range of advisers if necessary.

The burden of proof required by LGBT asylum seekers in relation to their claim acts as a further drive to the isolation of claimants from their ethnic or national compatriots. Similarly, evidence of participation in the commercial gay scene is often required of asylum claimants yet the cost of such participation and the lack of welcome to asylum seekers in the commercial gay scene may militate against such participation. Lesbians with children face specific challenges in proving that they are lesbians and as such at risk in their country of origin.

R6 The Home Office should review guidance to case owners on the evidence base required in determining both the sexuality or gender identity of asylum claimants and the assessment of risks they face in their country of origin. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) guidance on claims relating to sexual orientation and gender identity should be the starting point for this guidance and this states ‘self identification as LGBT should be taken as an indication of the

¹³ The UK does not operate a ‘white list’ that makes presumptions about the safety on return of failed asylum seekers. The Government believe that the right approach is to consider the protection needs of individuals on an individual basis. The term ‘white list’ in this report refers to section 94 of the Nationality, immigration and Asylum Act 2002, which concerns the appeal rights in respect of asylum and human rights claims that - after full and careful consideration - are found to be clearly unfounded. Section 94 of the 2002 Act includes provision for a list of countries (or parts of countries) to be designated for non-suspensive appeals and for the Home Secretary to add a country to the list if she is satisfied that (a) there is *in general* no risk of persecution of persons entitled to reside there and (b) that removal of persons entitled to reside there will not in general breach the UK’s obligations under the European Convention of Human Rights. Designation of a country does not mean that all claims from the country will be refused. Countries designated Section 94 of the 2002 Act are kept under review and if conditions in a particular country change to the extent that the legal test for designation is no longer met then the country concerned would be removed from the list.

¹⁴ All Country of Origin Information reports have a section on LGBT persons. These sections aim to document the position of LGBT persons in the country concerned; covering their legal position, societal attitudes, treatment by the authorities and other relevant information. However, the level of information provided is largely dictated by availability and it is often difficult to obtain reliable information about these issues, particularly for countries where LGBT persons may feel obliged to conduct their personal lives in a clandestine manner.

individual's sexual orientation'. Guidance on sensitivities of handling LGBT asylum claims is needed. As a minimum all UKBA case owners and interpreters used by UKBA should undertake diversity training that includes tackling homophobia and transphobia. Ideally this should be extended to all involved in the asylum decision making process including tribunal chairs, judges etc. This training needs to underline the differences between lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender experiences, particularly where this has developed outside a Western environment and within a homophobic culture. The development of this guidance should include advice for case owners on appropriate enquiries and interview techniques to use during the asylum process for LGBT asylum claims.

5.2.4. Accommodation

Only a minority of interviewees were accommodated by the UKBA (although a significant number had moved from such accommodation). In most cases individuals were dependent upon friends' partners or casual acquaintances. Unlike many other asylum seekers very few lived with their families. These arrangements were seldom by choice: some interviewees identified that they had abandoned UKBA accommodation due to intolerable levels of homophobia and the failure of landlords to tackle this. This has been treated as voluntary abandonment and means that thereafter they are denied access to further accommodation services.

- R7 The UKBA should review and refine the guidance and contractual requirements imposed on landlords providing accommodation to ensure that LGBT residents are safe and can live lives free from homophobic or transphobic harassment. This should include ensuring that LGBT asylum seekers have access to well publicised, safe and confidential reporting mechanisms.**
- R8 Landlords providing such accommodation should ensure that all policies and procedures promote LGBT inclusion and that all staff (managers and front-line staff) undertake appropriate training of the sort provided by Stonewall Housing that includes identifying and tackling homophobia and transphobia.**
- R9 Landlords should consider sub-contracting the management of a proportion of their asylum accommodation to appropriate bodies that can provide more sympathetic support to LGBT asylum seekers.**
- R10 Local authorities should work regionally (e.g. across London) and work with regional bodies, such as the Greater London Authority and national agencies such as the Homes and Communities Agency to develop appropriate accommodation for LGBT refugees.**

In some cases interviewees reported that the UKBA or its landlords have been unsympathetic to complaints of harassment suffered due to homophobia or transphobia. Such harassment has been suffered at the hands of other tenants or from neighbours. It should be noted that for the

interviewees they not only suffered intolerable levels of harassment but as a result of such harassment left UKBA accommodation and were thereafter denied access to further accommodation services.

R11 The Home Office should review and develop mandatory guidance, with clear procedures for all UKBA staff in dealing with homophobic and transphobic harassment.

R12 A code of practice should be developed for UKBA landlords which includes dealing appropriately with claims of homophobic or transphobic harassment. Compliance with this code of practice should form part of the landlord's contract with UKBA.

5.2.5. Detention

Twenty per cent of respondents had spent some time in detention facilities. Whilst many asylum seekers complain about conditions, again the experience of LGBT asylum seekers highlights additional concerns with respondents experiencing bullying, abuse and harassment by other detainees and detention facility staff due to their sexual/ gender identity.

R13 The Home Office should ensure that detention facility staff are governed by comprehensive policies and procedures and are adequately trained to provide a service that is sensitive to the needs of LGBT asylum seekers, including the risk of harassment and domestic abuse at the hands of other detainees. Detention centre staff should be reminded that bullying or abusive behaviour of any detainees will not be tolerated and will result in disciplinary action.

R14 LGBT asylum seekers in detention should be clearly advised that they should not tolerate bullying or abusive behaviour from other detainees or from detention centre staff. Asylum seekers should be given information on how to report acts of abusive behaviour and advised on what action may be taken to protect them.

5.2.6. The pull of London

A significant number of interviewees had been dispersed outside London but 50 per cent of those moved back to London to counter isolation and to be closer to friends. The absence of LGBT community resources in many places was cited as a key reason for this drift back to London. Alongside London there were other places, such as Manchester, seen as an alternative city that offered a range of LGBT resources accessible to asylum seekers.

R15 Decisions on the dispersal of LGBT asylum seekers should not be based solely on the capacity of the region to take their percentage of asylum seekers. UKBA should consider the development of guidance to ensure that LGBT asylum seekers are dispersed to parts of the country such as Manchester where there is a vibrant and welcoming LGBT host community. Similar guidance may be appropriate to inform dispersal for other vulnerable groups of asylum seekers.

Alongside regional variations interviewees reported that some parts of cities or towns were more and some parts less likely to have homophobic or transphobic host communities.

R16 UKBA accommodation providers should seek to develop accommodation resources for LGBT asylum seekers in parts of cities where host communities are more tolerant or welcoming of LGBT people or where support and management networks are in place to manage homophobic or transphobic harassment.

5.2.7. Exploitation

A number of respondents reported both financial and sexual exploitation. This included having to undertake unpaid work to maintain their accommodation and in some cases feeling obligated to perform sexual favours in return for food or accommodation. Young men were more vulnerable than women to both financial and sexual exploitation. As with many other asylum seekers, their immigration status can make them reluctant to report problems to the authorities.

In the past the Home Office has provided funding for work with male and transgender refugees at risk of, or involved in sex work.

R17 The provision of better support to stay in UKBA accommodation and access to other support services for young gay men in particular would reduce this vulnerability.

R18 Further consideration of the risk of exploitation and greater levels of vulnerability for LGBT asylum seekers by the Equality and Human Rights Commission should be sought.

R19 Funding for projects to support male and transgender asylum seekers at risk of, or involved in sex work should be encouraged.

5.2.8. Health

87.5 per cent of interviewees registered with GPs and most reported that their GP was aware of their sexuality. This high incidence of LGBT asylum seekers registered with a GP is a direct consequence of the signposting provided by other services they have accessed. The majority of the sample (92.5%) were service users of LGBT, BAME, and refugee support organisations.

As with other asylum seekers, LGBT asylum seekers reported physical ill health caused by poor accommodation and others reported poor mental health. A higher risk of HIV due to unsafe sex practices was reported by a few individuals, including those engaging in sex work where “bareback sex” (sex without condoms) commands a premium fee.

Whilst access to primary care was available, referral for secondary care including access to counselling and psychological therapies was denied in line with Department of Health guidance.

R20 The Department of Health should undertake further examination of access to some secondary care for asylum seekers, particularly counselling/psychological therapies. The current expansion of these services through the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme, led by primary care trusts provides a potential opportunity for targeted support to LGBT asylum seekers.

R21 HIV prevention programmes targeted at gay and bisexual men should examine ways in which they could better target their services toward LGBT asylum seekers at risk of sexual exploitation and/or participating in unsafe sex. Such services should also consider providing outreach services, including free condoms to residents of UKBA accommodation and through LGBT asylum seeker organisations.

5.2.9. Safety

In spite of high levels of name calling and abuse reported by large numbers of respondents, most felt they were safe in their neighbourhoods. Stakeholders discussed this issue at some length. The following quote offers an explanation behind the reasons why LGBT asylum seekers were perhaps not fearful for their personal safety in the areas where they live.¹⁵

Our experience with refugees and asylum seekers is two-fold: 1) They may be fearful of reporting any incidents if they are asylum seekers because they are afraid of negatively impacting on their asylum claim and 2) They may not identify their experiences of hate crime in this way because the violence they are fleeing can seem so much worse that it doesn't register as something that should be reported.

Other studies¹⁶ have indicated that lesbians are twice as likely as gay men to suffer sexual assault. Within the sample group at least one lesbian was subject to attempted gang rape because of her sexuality.

¹⁵ Debbie Gold, Chief Executive at GALOP.

¹⁶ For example, “Filling in the Blanks”, Galop, 2009.

R22 Third party reporting centres for hate-crime should be encouraged to develop awareness and support programmes for LGBT asylum seekers to ensure that they are aware of their rights to safety and the recourse they have. Provision should acknowledge the heightened risk faced of sexual assault faced by lesbians identified in other research such as Galop’s “Filling the Blanks”.

5.2.10. Support networks

The research identifies that LGBT asylum seekers are more likely to feel cut off from their families, often due to homophobic and transphobic attitudes. Similarly, most of the interviewees felt cut off from their own ethnic and national networks, particularly RCOs. There were mixed stories of support from RSOs. There is some evidence that RSOs are beginning to identify this issue, however, diversity training specifically focusing on the needs of LGBT service users and the monitoring of service provision specifically aimed at LGBT asylum seekers is not necessarily commonplace.

LGBT organisations focusing on BAME communities were seen as the most supportive. There were high levels of activism and volunteering in the latter, particularly from lesbian asylum seekers.

R23 Agencies providing community development services to RCOs need to take a more robust and challenging attitude to LGBT issues. This should be modelled on the work done by similar agencies in challenging sexism 15 years ago.

R24 Refugee Support and other organisations supporting refugees and asylum seekers need to ensure that all senior managers, front line staff and volunteers undertake diversity training specifically relating to the barriers and needs of LGBT clients. This should be mandatory training forming part of their induction and personal development. They should also examine ways of measuring both service uptake by LGBT asylum seekers and the LGBT service users views of services provided.

R25 Public and charitable funders should provide more support *and* challenge RCOs in respect of the accessibility of their organisations to LGBT people.

R26 Public and charitable funders should be encouraged to provide support and resources to LGBT asylum groups. Such funding should encourage volunteering and self-help from within these communities.

The experience of LGBT asylum seekers with regards to services provided by mainstream (i.e. not asylum focussed) LGBT organisations was mixed. Many felt they were not made to feel particularly welcome and received limited support and little empathy to the barriers they faced. Stakeholders from mainstream LGBT organisations acknowledged this criticism and identified a keenness to address these shortfalls and develop more “asylum-responsive” services.

R27 Councils for Voluntary Service and other third sector networks should develop support and networking opportunities for mainstream LGBT organisations to develop their links with smaller LGBT asylum seeker groups.

R28 LGBT voluntary and community organisations need training and funding to increase capacity to meet the needs of asylum seekers.

Most LGBT asylum seekers make some use of the commercial gay scene, not least because this is seen as a way of enhancing their asylum application. However, many have not always found a welcoming environment and felt they were discriminated against because of their ethnic or racial appearance. There were mixed views amongst stakeholders about the degree to which asylum seekers should be further encouraged to make use of the gay commercial scene.

R29 LGBT community organisations, as part of their commitment to developing more “asylum-responsive” services should seek to include asylum seekers in events and where applicable undertake planning with commercial LGBT venues. This could include promoting social events at non commercial LGBT venues and occasional free nights at commercial venues to address the financial disadvantage faced by asylum seekers.

5.2.11. Other issues

As noted at the start of this section, this report represents the first substantial insight into the lives and experiences of LGBT asylum seekers. It should however only be considered as a starting point. For example, this research focused upon asylum seekers and not refugees and does not look at how the process of integration may differ for LGBT refugees from other groups of refugees once granted the right to stay. Further studies could also examine how the different experiences of LGBT asylum seekers during this period impact upon their subsequent efforts to integrate.

Whilst the report did identify a significant proportion of LGBT asylum seekers living with disability (around 15%) there was only limited consideration of the additional impact of this factor on their lives. There are also other areas of consideration for future research, for example:

- **Older LGBT asylum seekers** – none of the interviewees who took part in this research were over 45. Stakeholders working with LGBT asylum seekers confirmed that they rarely worked with this age group.
- **Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and young people leaving care** – again, none of the research sample came from these groups. Such LGBT young people may be at even greater risk of exclusion or exploitation.

- R30** This research should be seen as the starting point for further studies. There is a need for further research to explore the needs of LGBT refugee and asylum seekers, including potentially more hidden and excluded sub-communities, such as unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people leaving care.
- R31** The different asylum experiences for LGBT asylum seekers highlighted in this report need to be explored in relation to its impact upon integration for those granted asylum.

5.3. Table of recommendations by target audience

This section provides a brief table of recommendations by target audience.

Target audience	Recommendation number
Charitable Trusts	4, 19, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31
Councils for Voluntary Service/Third Sector networking organisations	23, 27, 28
Department of Health/Primary Care Trusts	20, 21
Detention Centres	13, 14
Foreign & Commonwealth Office/ Department for International Development	3
Hate Crime Third Party Reporting Centres	22
HIV Prevention Programmes (Providers and Commissioners)	21
Home Office/UKBA	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17 19, 30, 31.
Immigration law providers	4
Legal Service Commission	4
LGBT Community organisations and commercial venues	28, 29
Local Authorities/ London Councils/ Greater Manchester Authorities	8, 9, 10
Refugee Support Organisations/ Community development providers	23, 24
Research organisations and research commissioners	30, 31
UKBA Landlords	8, 9, 11, 12

6. Glossary of terms

Asylum is protection given by a country to someone who has fled persecution in their own country.

Asylum Process is the legal process asylum seekers must go through as the UK Border Agency (see below) assesses their application for asylum and includes asylum screening, Home Office asylum interviews and appeals. Successful applicants are granted Refugee Status and given Leave to Remain in the UK, initially for 5 years¹⁷. Unsuccessful applicants are expected to return to their country of origin, or in some cases are allowed to appeal their failed asylum claim.

In the UK, **asylum seekers** are defined as those who have fled their own country and lodged an application for protection on the basis of the Refugee Convention¹⁸ and are awaiting a decision. Until a request for asylum has been granted, the person is referred to as an asylum seeker.

Asylum support, also referred to as 'UKBA support', is a form of support provided by the UK Border Agency (see below) to asylum seekers and consists of accommodation and /or subsistence support. If they have additional care needs, due to chronic illness or disability, asylum seekers may also be eligible for support from their local authority.

BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) refers to those in black, Asian or minority ethnic groups. BME refers to Black and Minority Ethnic groups and is the language most often used within the equalities field. The London Development Agency and all related bodies use the acronym BAME.

Bisexual is an individual who is physically, romantically, emotionally and/or spiritually attracted to men and women. Bisexuals need not have had equal sexual experience with both men and women; in fact, they need not have had any sexual experience at all to identify as bisexual.

A **case owner** is the person who deals with every aspect of a person's application for asylum, from beginning to end. Asylum seekers who make an application will be allocated a case owner within a few days of making their application for asylum. The case owner is the single point of contact on the progress of an application, both for the asylum seeker and for anyone who

¹⁷ Since September 2005 individuals awarded refugee status are no longer granted indefinite leave to remain in the country, as they were prior to this date. Instead, refugees are now granted a limited period of five years leave to remain after which their cases will be reviewed to determine whether or not they are still in need of protection, and thus able to remain in the UK

¹⁸ The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is the key legal document in defining who is a refugee, their rights and the legal obligations of states. Under the Convention, a refugee is someone who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to

represents them, such as a lawyer or other adviser.

Detention Centre - in some cases, asylum seekers may be detained in UKBA 'secure centres.' Asylum seekers may be detained if they do not make regular contact with their case owner, fail to carry identity documents to meetings with their case owners, and for any other reason that leads the UKBA to believe the applicant may be at risk of breaking off contact or 'going underground.'

Discretionary leave is a form of immigration status granted outside the immigration rules in very limited circumstances to people who have been refused refugee status but who do not fulfil the criteria for humanitarian protection.

Dispersal is an asylum policy which came into force when the *Immigration and Asylum Act 1999* introduced new measures to transfer newly arrived asylum seekers from London and the South East to other parts of the country. Since April 2000, unless there are exceptional circumstances, asylum seekers who qualify for asylum support and who need both subsistence and accommodation are offered accommodation outside London and the Southeast.

Gay this is an adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic, emotional and/or spiritual attractions are to people of the same sex (e.g., *gay man, gay people*). In contemporary contexts, *lesbian* (n.) is often a preferred term for women.

Gender Identity is one's internal, personal sense of being a man or a woman (or a boy or girl). For transgender people, their birth-assigned sex and their own internal sense of gender identity do not match.

'Hidden homelessness' refers to the state of destitute asylum seekers who have no source of income and no contractual agreement to live in any given accommodation. They may spend nights sleeping at the accommodations of friends, partners, acquaintances and at times they may sleep rough.

Humanitarian protection (HP) is a form of immigration status granted for up to five years to people who do not meet the criteria for refugee status (see below), but who cannot be returned to their country of origin as they face a serious risk to life or person for one or more specific reasons. These are: death penalty, unlawful killing, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Indefinite leave to remain (ILR) - if after the five year qualifying period a refugee is granted continuing status (s)he is given 'indefinite leave to remain.' This is a form of immigration status given by the Home Office. Indefinite leave to remain (ILR) is also called 'permanent residence' or

such fear, is unwilling to return to it."

'settled status' as it gives permission to stay in the UK on a permanent basis.

Intersex is a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male.

Lesbian is a woman whose enduring physical, romantic, emotional and/or spiritual attraction is to other women.

LGBT is an abbreviation used to describe people who define themselves as either **lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender**. LGBT is a self-referential category that people may use to describe their sexuality and/or gender identity.

The **National Asylum Support Service (NASS)** was created by the 1999 Asylum and Immigration Act and charged with deciding which asylum seekers were eligible for state benefits such as asylum support accommodation and income support, providing these benefits, and dispersing asylum seekers from London and the South East. In 2006 NASS ceased to exist as a directorate and its asylum support functions were eventually taken over by the newly formed United Kingdom Border Agency in April 2008 (see below for UKBA).

Refugee - the term 'refugee' has a strict legal definition set out in the Refugee Convention (see below) meaning a person who 'owing to a well-founded fear of being prosecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country...'

Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) are 'organisations rooted within, and supported by, the ethnic or national refugee/asylum seeker communities they serve...these RCOs are established by the refugees and asylum seekers themselves.'¹⁹

Refugee Convention means the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. This is the key legal document defining who is a refugee, their rights and the legal obligations of states. Originally drafted as a temporary way of dealing with the large number of displaced persons in Europe after the Second World War, the 1967 Protocol expanded the Convention to non-Europeans and removed the temporal limitation.

Refugee Status is a form of immigration status awarded to someone the Home Office recognises as a refugee as described in the Refugee Convention. Since September 2005 individuals awarded refugee status are no longer granted indefinite leave to remain in the country, as they

¹⁹ Zetter, R. and Pearl, M. (2000) 'The minority within the minority: refugee community based organisations in the UK and the impact of restrictionism' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. Vol. 26(4), pp. 675-98.

were prior to this date. Instead, refugees are now granted a limited period of five years leave to remain after which their cases will be reviewed to determine whether or not they are still in need of protection, and thus able to remain in the UK.

Refugee Support Organisations/Refugee Organisations (ROs) are organisations that provide advice, support, and sometimes specialist services (on issues such as mental health and disability) to refugees and asylum seekers. They may employ refugees or asylum seekers but were not set up by particular ethnic or national refugee and asylum-seeking communities.

A **Refused asylum seeker** is a person whose application for asylum has not been accepted by the Home Office and who has exhausted all rights of appeal against this decision.

Section 4

In some cases, asylum seekers whose applications have been rejected by UKBA and who have exhausted the appeals process may receive short-term support from UKBA while they make arrangements to return to their country of origin. This is known as Section 4 support because it is given under Section 4 of the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act. In order to qualify for section 4 support, there are strict requirements that need to be met²⁰.

In exceptional cases, some refused asylum seekers may be eligible for support when they cannot be returned to their country of origin. This includes “**Section 21**” support which meets the accommodation and subsistence costs of people who have no recourse to public funds but are deemed vulnerable and destitute, (e.g. by virtue of their HIV status) and fulfill the other eligibility tests.²¹ However, the House of Lords ruling in August 2008 on the duties of local authorities to support destitute, failed asylum seekers under Section 21 of the 1948 National Assistance Act may have a significant impact on local authorities’ continuing capacity to support such individuals in the future.

Sexual Orientation - the scientifically accurate term for an individual’s enduring physical, romantic, emotional and/or spiritual attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual orientations.

Social Services is the body run by a local authority or council that provides a number of services for adults, children and families who require advice, support or care because of their particular

²⁰ The person must be destitute and satisfy one of the following requirements: they are taking all reasonable steps to leave the United Kingdom; they are unable to leave the United Kingdom because of a physical barrier to travel or for some other medical reason; they are unable to leave the United Kingdom because the UKBA believes there is no safe route available; they have applied for a judicial review of their asylum application; or accommodation is necessary to prevent a breach of their rights, within the meaning of the Human Rights Act 1998.

need. Social Services also provide asylum support accommodation in some cases; this is not the same as UKBA asylum support accommodation.

Statutory service is a service that is required to exist by law, e.g. social services and the National Health Service.

Transgender - an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. The term may include but is not limited to: transsexuals, cross-dressers, and other gender-variant people. Transgender people may identify as female-to-male (FTM) or male-to-female (MTF). Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically²².

United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) is part of the Home Office and is responsible for securing the United Kingdom borders and controlling migration in the United Kingdom. UKBA also considers applications for permission to enter or stay in the United Kingdom, citizenship and asylum, and is also responsible for managing accommodation and support for asylum seekers. UKBA was formed in April 2008 from a merger of the **Border and Immigration Agency (BIA)**, Customs and UK Visas. Prior to that date, the BIA was the agency responsible for overseeing asylum support, and before that asylum support was overseen by the **National Asylum Support Service (NASS)**.²³

²¹ As contained in the 1948 National Assistance Act but with entitlements for certain groups heavily restricted in recent immigration and asylum legislation and further modified by case law.

²² Definition taken from GLAAD's (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) *Media Reference Guide*, 7th edition, May 2007, available at http://www.glaad.org/media/guide/GLAAD_MediaRefGuide_7thEdition.pdf

²³ The institutional legacy of the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) has been far-reaching and amongst asylum seekers, refugees, and Refugee Support Organisations it is common to refer to contemporary UKBA asylum support services, including accommodation, as 'NASS.' However, NASS ceased to exist as a directorate in 2006 and any current references to 'NASS' must be understood as UKBA asylum support services.

7. Research tools

7.1. Steering group

This research project was overseen by a steering group that included:

Heather Hutchings	Amnesty International
Paul Birtill	Metropolitan Support Trust
Charlotte Keeble	Metropolitan Support Trust
Sarah Walker	Metropolitan Support Trust
Bob Green	Stonewall Housing
Florence Kizza	UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group
Jill Power	UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group
Sebastian Rocca	UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group

7.2. Co-operative enquiry workshop

The emerging findings from the research were discussed at a stakeholder workshop on 6 March 2009. This event was designed to test and refine the research findings and develop practice-based recommendations. Participants included:

Heather Hutchings	Amnesty International
Mohammed	Iranian LGBT Asylum Group
Charlotte Keeble	Metropolitan Support Trust
Michael Bell	Michael Bell Associates
Cole Hansen	Michael Bell Associates
Dean Purdey	Naz Project London
Mohamud Yasin	Naz Project London
Bob Green	Stonewall Housing
Brenda Wade	UK Black Pride
Erin Power	UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group
Jill Power	UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group

7.3. Other participating stakeholders

Stakeholders for this research were individuals and organisations that held an abiding interest in the housing and homelessness issues specific to LGBT asylum seekers because they work with such service users or interact with them on a regular basis. Several of the following stakeholders helped to identify service users and contacts who were interviewed for this research.

Debbie Gold	Galop
Bob Green	Stonewall Housing
Ali Hilli	Iraqi LGBT
Simon Jeff	Home Office
Gemma Juma	Refugee Council
Michael Murray	Advice ^{UK}
Ryan Nelson	Refugee Action
Victoria Richardson	Home Office
Carolyne Tah	Home Office
Peter Tatchell	Outrage
Roudy Shafie	Greater London Authority
Adrian Ward	Home Office
Mohamud Yasin	Naz Project London

Further input from the following organisations:

Imaan
Iranian LGBT Asylum Group
Praxis
UK Black Pride
UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group
Women Asylum Seekers Together

7.4. Service user interview schedule

Some Questions About You...

I am going to ask you a few questions about yourself and your family/household.

1. **Do you identify as:**
 Male Trans
 Female

2. **Are you a Trans-person? (Transexual/Transgender – someone who has changed or intends to change their biological sex)**
 no
 yes **If yes how do you describe yourself?** _____

3. **Are you:**
 Gay Bisexual
 Lesbian

4. **How old are you?**
 18 – 24 years
 25 – 29 years
 30 – 44 years
 45 – 59 years
 60+ years

5. **Where do you currently live (town and city)**

6. **How long have you lived in that part of the country?**
_____ year/s _____ months

7. **How long have you lived in the UK?**
_____ year/s _____ months

- 8 a. **Have you lived anywhere else in the UK?**
 no in?
 yes

- 8 b. **If yes, where have else have you lived?**

10. **What is your first language?**

9. **Which country were you born**
11. **What is your ethnic group?**
Asian or Asian British Indian
 Pakistani
 Bangladeshi
 any other Asian background

Please say what: _____

- Middle Eastern Arab
 Kurdish
 Iranian
 any other Middle Eastern background

Please say what: _____

- Black
- Caribbean
 - African
 - any other Black background

Please say what: _____

- Mixed
- White and Black Caribbean
 - White and Black African
 - White and Asian
 - any other mixed background

Please say what: _____

White

Please say what: _____

- Other ethnic groups
- Chinese
 - any other ethnic group

Please say what: _____

12. How would you describe your religious beliefs?

- No religion
- Christian **Which denomination?**

- Muslim
- Buddhist
- African traditional religion

Please specify:

- Hindu
- Jewish
- Sikh
- Other religion

Please specify:

13. Do you attend any religious services or participate in any denominational activities?

- no
- yes

If you answered 'yes', please explain:

14. Who do you live with? (tick all that apply)

- Alone
- With a partner
- With a dependent child / children I am responsible for
- With my parents / step parents
- With other family members

Please specify:

- _____
- With friends
 - With housemates or people I share with

15. What is your current accommodation type?

- Private rented
- Housing in Multiple Occupation
- Local Authority accommodation

Please specify:

- _____
- National Asylum Support Service accommodation

Please specify:

- _____
- Leaving care
 - Homeless
 - Other

Please specify:

16. Have you experienced homelessness in the past 12 months?

- no
- yes

17. Do you have a husband, wife, civil partner or long-term partner (boyfriend/girlfriend)?

- no
- yes

18. Are you responsible for the day-to-day care of:

- a child / children
- an adult dependent (sick, disabled and / or elderly person)
- neither of these

19. Could you give us some indication of your English levels?				
<i>Please tick the relevant boxes</i>				
	No problems	Very few problems	Occasional problems	Quite a few problems
Speaking English				
Reading English				
Writing English				

20. From where do you get your income? (tick all that apply)

- Wages
- Income support
- Job seekers allowance
- Disability benefits
- Housing benefit
- Council tax benefit
- Asylum support from the Social Services department

- Asylum support from National Asylum Support Service
- Support for refused asylum seekers (Section 4)
- Money from friends
- Sex Work
- Begging
- Other; please explain: _____

21. What is your immigration status?

- Overstaying an expired visa
- Refugee status or limited leave to remain
- Awaiting asylum ruling
- I have been refused asylum
- Other (Please Specify): _____

22. If you are seeking, or have sought asylum, what was the basis of your asylum claim? (e.g. political persecution, sexuality) Please explain:

Some more questions about your accommodation...

23. How many accommodations have you lived in within the UK?

24. If you have lived in multiple accommodations, why have you had to move?

25. Please tell us at length about your present accommodation, (e.g. Who is your landlord? How much do you pay? How many people do you live with?)

26. Have you had any problems with your accommodation? (Problems such as leaks, or any issues with the Landlord). If yes, what were they?

27. If you have had problems with your accommodation, did you get any help? if yes, who provided this help and did it solve the problem? (Charities, social services, council authorities)

28. Have you ever utilised any services from organisations that work specifically with asylum seekers and/or refugees? If so, please list the organisation(s) and

describe the service.

29. Have you ever utilised any homelessness services, e.g. from local councils, NASS, or charity organisations? If so please list the service provider and describe the service.

30. Have you been dispersed by the Home Office to another location in the UK? If so, why do you return to London?

31. Have you ever been held in a Detention Centre by the Home Office? If yes, could you please describe your experiences there, how you were treated, whether you disclosed your sexuality, if the staff were able to accommodate your needs?

32. [*For Women Only*] Have you ever stayed in a refuge for victims of domestic violence? If so, did you face any difficulties related to either being an asylum seeker, LGBT, or both? Please explain.

Some questions about your safety....

33. How safe do you feel in your accommodation?

- Very safe
- Fairly safe
- A bit unsafe
- Very unsafe

34. How safe do you feel walking outside in this neighbourhood alone in the daytime?

- Very safe
- Fairly safe
- a bit unsafe
- very unsafe
- never walk anywhere alone in the daytime

35. How safe do you feel walking outside in this neighbourhood alone in the evening?

- Very safe
- Fairly safe
- a bit unsafe
- very unsafe
- never walk anywhere alone in the evening

36. Are you currently experiencing any problems with your accommodation associated with being LGBT (tick all that apply)? If so, please explain at length.

I find it difficult to be open about being LGBT with the people I live with	
I am finding it difficult to find accommodation where I can be open about my sexuality	
My landlord is harassing me because I am LGBT	
My neighbours are harassing me because I am LGBT	
I have had problems getting accommodation with my same sex partner	
Other (please specify)	

37. In the last 12 months, have you, or has anyone in your household, experienced any harassment whilst living at this address? *By harassment I mean incidents such as insulting behaviour, abusive language, physical attacks, while you were in or near your home or damage to your property, but excluding burglary.*

- Yes
 No
 Don't know

38. What do you think was the main reason for this harassment? And so is this.....

- Because you're an asylum seeker
 Person harassing you was disturbed/ill/criminal
 Your race/ethnic group
 Your gender
 A dispute with a neighbour
 Your disability
 A dispute with the landlord
 Living with HIV
 You being lesbian/gay or bisexual or trans
 Another reason
 Don't know

39. Is the harassment still going on?

- No Yes

40 a. Have you reported the harassment?

- No Yes

40 b. If you answered yes, who did you report the harassment to and what was done about it?

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41a. In the past 12 months have you experienced any of the following in relation to being LGBT, and if so, where?

Name calling	
Verbal abuse	

Physical attack	
Blackmail	
Threats/intimidation	
Rape/sexual assault	
Damage to your property	
Domestic violence	
Outcast from your community Please explain what you mean by 'community'	
Other – please specify	

41b. If you answered 'yes' to any of the above, please explain the occurrence(s) if you feel comfortable doing so.

--

42. In the last 12 months have safety fears or concerns about homophobia or transphobia made you do any of the following?

Stopped you showing affection to someone of the same sex in public	
Change your appearance or image	
Changed who you socialise with	
Avoided taking part in neighbourhood activities	
Change where you live	
Asked NASS to move you	
Change your job	
Change your school or course	
Stopped you from applying for a particular job or course	
None of the above	
Other – please specify	

43. Who knows about your sexuality? (tick one on each line)

	Yes	No	Not applicable
your partner			
your mother			
your father			
your GP (doctor)			
Psychologist or Community Psychiatric Nurse			
your employer			
Your solicitor			
housing service providers (e.g. NASS, local authorities)			
Other social worker			
Please			

list: _____				
	All	Some	None	Not applicable
your children				
your brothers / sisters				
your friends				
your work colleagues				
other people you live with				

44. Please tell us a bit more about why you have made the decisions you have about who to tell and who not to tell?

Some questions about health....

45. Over the last 12 months, would you say that your health has, on the whole, been

- Good
- Fairly good
- Not good

46. Are you and the people in your family registered with a GP?

- Yes Please say if you know if this is a permanent or temporary registration
- No
- Don't know

47. Have you or anyone in the family visited the accident and emergency department of a hospital in the last 12 months?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

If yes, please describe why:

48. Are you or anyone in your household registered as disabled with social services?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

49a. Looking at this list, do you or anyone else in this household, child or adult, have any of these special needs?

- frail elderly
- physical disability
- learning disability
- mental health problem

- vulnerable young person or child in care
- severe sensory disability
- chronic long term illness
- depression or anxiety

49b. please explain if any members of your household have any other special needs:

--

50 a. Could you please describe any issues you have had with alcohol and drugs? *Tick as many as apply. Please remember that your responses are confidential and you are perfectly free NOT to answer any questions put to you. By the word 'issues' in the statements below we mean that there has been something 'problematic' for you with your use of drugs or alcohol .*

1	I have had issues with alcohol in the past	
	I have had issues with drugs in the past	
	I currently have issues with drugs	
	I currently have issues with alcohol	
2	My friends have had issues with alcohol	
	My family have had issues with drugs	
3	I am currently in a treatment programme	
	I have gone through a treatment programme to completion	
	I have attended a treatment programme but did not complete it	
4	I currently use drugs and/or alcohol recreationally and do not consider this to be a problem.	

50 b. If you answered yes to any of the above, could you please tell us about your history of drug or alcohol use, especially since you've been in the UK?

--

51. Have you or anyone in the household suffered from any health problems in the past 12 months?

- Chest problems**
- Nose problems**
- Skin conditions**
- Rheumatic conditions**
- Circulatory conditions**
- General health problems**
- Mental Health problems**

- Sexually transmitted infections
- Other

please specify:

52. Has anyone helped you in dealing with these health problems? (for example, community group, landlord) Probe for any obstacles to dealing with health problems.

Some questions about your social life...

53. Do you socialise with people from your own ethnic/national group?

- Yes No

54. Are these welcoming?

- Yes No

55. Tell us more about your experiences socialising with people from your own ethnic/national group.

56a. Do you utilise or attend any social services, organisations, or events for LGBT people? (such as Pride, UKLGIG, etc.)

- Yes No

56b. If you answered 'Yes', please list these services, organisations, or events and describe your experiences and involvement.

57a. Do you go to any commercial venues for LGBT people? (clubs, bars, etc.)

- Yes No

57b. If you answered 'yes', are these experiences welcoming?

- Yes No

57c. Tell us more about your experiences at commercial venues for LGBT people.

58. How often do you socialise on the commercial LGBT scene (clubs, pubs, etc)?

Daily	
Several times a week	
Once a week	
Several times a month	
Once a month	
Less often	
Rarely	

Never	
-------	--

59. Have you ever relied upon contacts from the commercial LGBT scene for temporary accommodation or food?

- Yes No

60. Have any of the following prevented you from using the commercial LGBT scene?

Money/affordability		
The availability of alcohol		
Smoke filled environment		
Drugs environment		
Being made to feel unwelcome		
Music policy		
Your Age		
Family		
Friends		
No-one to go with		
Too centred upon casual sex		
No one wants to talk		
Fear of being associated with LGBT scene; i.e. being 'outed'		
Feeling like you stand out because of your race, appearance, or background		
Language problems		
Being treated like a novelty		
I'm not interested		
Other – please specify		

7.5. Interviewee sample frame

Attributes	Actual	Target
Living as men	72% (29)	50%
Living as Women	28% (11)	25%
Young People <30	42% (17)	25%
Circumstances		
In London	70% (28)	50%
Out of London	30% (12)	25%
Private Rented	35% (14)	12.5%
HMOs	12.5% (5)	12.5%
Homeless	5% (2)	12.5%
Staying with Friends/family	48% (19)	12.5%
Leaving Care	0	5%
Living Alone	15% (6)	25%
Living with Partners	17.5% (7)	25%
Awaiting Asylum Decision	72.5% (29)	45%
Refused	10% (4)	45%
Section 21	0	10%

7.6. Commissioners and researchers

Refugee Support / Metropolitan Support Trust

Refugee Support is one of the country's leading providers of housing and support for refugees and asylum seekers, and is the brand name of Metropolitan Support Trust's (MST) refugee services.

MST is a registered social landlord and a registered charity. It operates across London, the East and West Midlands, and Yorkshire and Humberside, and works with refugees, people with mental health needs and learning disabilities, older people and other client groups. MST also advocates for progressive social policy.

One of the exciting initiatives within Refugee Support is the new programmes made possible by the Ashmore Fund. The Ashmore Fund is restricted within MST and was created from the free reserves of the former Refugee Housing Association. It is named after the former Chair, Gillian Ashmore. The purpose of the fund is to support innovative initiatives for the benefit of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, and the Research and Consultancy Unit has received funding for its set up costs from it.

MST is part of Metropolitan Housing Partnership and is the specialist care and support provider.

Michael Bell Associates

Michael Bell Associates is a research and consultancy practice established in 1993 with experience in social research, community development and health and social care related projects. Clients include a wide range of public bodies from government departments and agencies to NHS bodies and local authorities to not for profit providers.

We provide evidence based and practical solutions to promote social cohesion and tackle social exclusion. Working exclusively with the public and not-for-profit sectors, we aim to provide cost effective and high quality, integrated research and consultancy services.



www.mba4consultancy.co.uk

7.7. Research project steering group members

Stonewall Housing

At the heart of Stonewall Housing's work, since they started in 1983, is the aim to find safe and secure homes for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. They provide supported accommodation for young LGBT people and housing advice and advocacy to LGBT people of all ages through a telephone helpline and weekly drop-in surgeries.

Stonewall Housing also influences housing policy and practice at local, regional and national level and provides training and consultancy services to other housing organisations in order to raise awareness of the housing needs of the LGBT communities.



www.stonewallhousing.org

United Kingdom Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group

Since 1993 UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group (UKLGIG) has been providing immigration support, information and advice to the lesbian and gay community. They have had enormous success, achieving the first legal recognition of any sort for same-sex relationships with the creation of the Unmarried Partners Rule. This acceptance of lesbian and gay relationships as valid and equivalent to heterosexual partnerships sowed the seed for all future legal rights and ultimately led to civil partnership legislation.

As the area of need changed, the group's focus shifted to those persecuted because of their sexuality. UKLGIG continues to use its experience, expertise, reputation and skill in promoting human rights and eliminating discrimination through providing support to LGBT people seeking asylum. There is currently no other dedicated organisation tackling the multifaceted problems faced by lesbian and gay asylum seekers in the UK.



www.uklgig.org.uk

8. Literature review and select bibliography

8.1. Literature review

There have been few formal studies on LGBT asylum seekers to date. Those that have been commissioned tend to focus on the legal obstacles to claiming asylum based upon sexuality or gender identity (see De Jong 2003). There are no studies of the housing or homelessness issues faced by LGBT asylum seekers. However, several studies on the link between LGBT identity and homelessness for UK citizens have been carried out (see O'Connor et al 2001 and Gold 2005). Additionally, studies of ethnic minority gay men and migrant gay men have identified several of the issues that are shared by LGBT asylum seekers as put forth in this report (see Sigma Research 2004b and 2004c).

1. Title	Migrant Gay Men: Redefining Community, Restoring Identity
Author / Publisher	Sigma Research, February 2004b (ISBN 1 872956 73 4)
Description:	Study of gay migrant communities, including asylum seekers, in London.
Key Points:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status as migrants interacts with gay ID and can preclude integration with wider society. • Exclusion from London's financial, social, and sexual opportunities (often because of language, education, or other cultural barriers) renders London as problematic as, or worse than, home country situation where homophobia and persecution may have been the initial causes for migration.

2. Title	Ethnic Minority Gay Men: Redefining Community, Restoring Identity
Author / Publisher	Sigma Research, February 2004c (ISBN 1 872956 74 2)
Description:	Analysis of culture and identity formation for Black Caribbean and Irish gay men in London.
Key Points:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'double-exclusion' analysis of gay minority men is misleading; they may be able to form ID at nexus of two cultural communities (ethnic and gay) and capitalise on aspects or resources of both. • Racism exists within gay community; more important to tackle broader social structures of inequity as gay scene is situated within them.

3. Title	Safra Project: Identifying the difficulties experienced by Muslim lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in accessing social and legal services; Initial Findings
Author /	Safra Project, January 2003 (ISBN 1 872956 87 4)

Publisher	
Description:	Identifies issues Muslim LBT women face as result of sexuality/gender ID within their ethnic/cultural/religious communities and highlights difficulties in accessing appropriate social/legal services. Concludes with needs analysis and recommendations.
Key Points:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased likelihood of domestic violence for LBT women from Muslim or other conservative cultural background. Links with homelessness. • Invisibility of LBT women in refuges compounds; difficulties of coming out, getting appropriate services • Asylum seekers not eligible for housing benefit, refuges reluctant to take them; not enough appropriate hostel spaces for women with children, can be evicted if asylum claim undecided. • Most LBT AS find extremely difficult coming out to HO interviewer, legal representative, and/or in presence of interpreter; especially if either is from Muslim background • Some do not realise sexuality can be basis of asylum claim, or relevant to claims for other reasons

4. Title	Safe and Sound: Asylum seekers and temporary accommodation
Author / Publisher	Greater London Authority, June 2004 (ISBN 1 85261 624 5)
Description:	Mayoral office's examination of asylum seekers' housing needs and available services in London.
Key Points:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thorough examination of NASS and local council housing and support services for asylum seekers. • Treatment of vulnerability issues and definitions

5. Title	ICAR Navigation Guide: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) refugees and asylum seekers
Author / Publisher	Anisa de Jong, Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK, September 2003
Description:	Good overview of legal obstacles in asylum process specific to LGBT. Some treatment of cultural and institutional barriers in social services and public life.
Key Points :	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of definitional issues pertaining to LGBT identities and human rights and asylum norms • Overview of statistical problems with measuring numbers of LGBT asylum seekers; availability of country of origin information • Concludes with key issues and recommendations

6. Title	Crimes of Hate, Conspiracy of Silence: Torture and Ill-Treatment based on Sexual Identity
Author / Publisher	Amnesty International 2001
Description:	Overview of discrimination and persecution faced by LGBT in home countries and asylum obstacles abroad.

7. Title	Sexual Exclusion: issues and best practice in lesbian, gay, and bisexual housing and homelessness
Author / Publisher	Gold, Deborah Shelter, March 2005
Description:	Guidance report to raise awareness of housing and homelessness issues specific to lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.
Key Points :	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing providers are not trained to consider sexuality • LGB may not use services, sleep rough, stay in difficult/dangerous situations, leave services, accept homophobic treatment within services • Invisibility of LGB homeless and their needs results makes it difficult to get the right support; results in increased vulnerability • Urban LGB scene a cause of migration and source of support for many; but has negative side in pressure to conform, drugs and alcohol misuse, unsafe sex and other associated unhealthy behaviour

8.2. Select bibliography

Filling in the Blanks: LGBT Hate Crime in London. London: Galop 2009.

The Advice Gap: a study of barriers to housing advice for people from black and minority ethnic communities. Shelter, January 2007.

Annual Report 2008. London: UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group.

Civil Partnership: a framework for the legal recognition of same-sex couples. London: Women and Equality Unit, June 2003.

Destitution by Design, Withdrawal of support from in-country asylum applicants: an impact assessment for London. Greater London Authority, February 2004.

The Destitution Trap: Asylum's Untold Story. Refugee Action, 2006.

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Hidden in Plain Sight: Homelessness amongst lesbian and gay youth. O'Connor, William and Molloy. December 2001. ISBN (0 904607 79 8).

Housing Support Services to Refugees: a Service Specification. Scottish Executive Social Research/MBA, 2006.

The Housing Needs of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual People in Wales. Triangle Wales and Stonewall Cymru, October 2006.

Meeting the Needs of Homeless Lesbian and Gay Youth: a Guide for Housing and Homelessness Agencies. National Centre for Social Research (with Stonewall Housing), 2001.

Please note the identities of all the interviewees in this document have been withheld and all images of people are generic.

If you would like more information about the report please contact the Research and Consultancy Unit on 020 7501 2234 or email mst@mst-online.org.uk



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