

ROME 24, 25 & 26 APRIL 2025

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# LIVED REALITIES OF BLACK, RACIALIZED, ROMA, AND CENTRAL ASIAN LESBIANS\* IN THE EU

2024-2025



**EUROCENTRALASIAN  
LESBIAN\*COMMUNITY**

**Intersectionality in action — when racism gets in  
the way of LBQ women and non-binary persons  
Lived Realities of Black, Racialized, Roma, and Central Asian  
lesbians\* in the EU**

2024-2025



**Funded by  
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When referencing this report, we recommend the following citation: EL\*C (2025), Intersectionality in action — When racism gets in the way of LBQ women and non-binary persons. Lived Realities of Black, Racialized, Roma, and Central Asian lesbians\* in the EU

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**The Eurocentralasian Lesbian\* Community – EL\*C is a lesbian feminist and intersectional network. We publish our own research focused on lesbians and we are present at an institutional level with our advocacy to ensure that lesbian needs are visible, heard, and considered when creating policies and laws. For more information, please visit our website: [www.lesbiangenius.org](http://www.lesbiangenius.org)**

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# LIST OF ACRONYMS

BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, People of Color
BPOC	Black people and People of Color
EU	European Union
GBV	Gender-based violence
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
LBQ	Lesbian, bisexual and queer women
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer
POC	People of color
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

# INTRODUCTION

## About EL\*C

The EL\*C – The EuroCentralAsian Lesbian\* Community - started as a self-organized space in 2017, recognizing the multitude of needs surrounding the rights, visibility, and well-being of lesbians throughout Europe and Central Asia.

EL\*C uses the term “lesbian” as inclusive of cis, trans, and intersex women and non-binary persons who self-identify as lesbian, bisexual, and queer. For us, using the word “lesbian” is part of the political struggle for visibility, empowerment, and representation, bearing in mind that the word “lesbian” is one of the most stigmatized and marginalized words. It has long related to shame and disgust, as well as sexual objectification and mainstream porn. The word has historically been hijacked and distorted by the male gaze. It is time to shake off the stigma. The rest of this report refers to “lesbians” in line with EL\*C’s political statement.

## Scope and purpose of the report

In Europe, public debates and policies about anti-LGBTIQ discrimination and LGBTIQ human rights overwhelmingly concentrate on the experiences of white cisgender gay men<sup>1</sup> as representatives of the LGBTIQ community. This emphasis has led to less political and empirical engagement with lesbian, bisexual, and queer women’s experiences<sup>2</sup>, especially when they are racialized. Despite their leadership and activism in major social movements across Europe<sup>3</sup>, the experiences of racialized and ethnic LBQ women in Europe remain under-researched.

This report aims to highlight the intersectional discrimination that racialized and migrant lesbians face in the European Union when seeking access to employment, housing, healthcare, and political participation. Indeed, racialized LBQ women’s race, gender, and sexual orientation collectively shape their experience. The notion of intersectionality is a concept and a tool drawing from Black Feminist theory and praxis. It was coined and theorized by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an African American critical race scholar and civil rights activist, in 1989. The general idea is to recognize that no one faces a “single issue life” and that different aspects of one’s identity may

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<sup>1</sup> Boulila S., Lagerman J., Tryfonidou A., Olasik M., and Carastathis A., (2020), “Advancing Liveable Lives for Lesbians in Europe— Intersectional Challenges and Future Policymaking”. German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ). <https://hephaestus.nup.ac.cy/handle/11728/12063>.

<sup>2</sup> Luibhéid E., (2020), “Migrant and Refugee Lesbians: Lives That Resist the Telling”. *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 24 (2): 57–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2019.1622935>.

<sup>3</sup> Emejulu A. and Bassel L. (2021), “Women of Colour Resist: Exploring Women of Colour’s Activism in Europe”. Coventry, United Kingdom, University of Warwick. <http://www.wocresist.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Women-of-Colour-Resist.pdf>.

be subjected to oppression. When several of these aspects intersect, these oppressions do not only add up but merge and form new challenges<sup>4</sup>.

This report focuses on three groups with distinct realities: Black lesbians and lesbians of color (hereafter “BPOC”), Central Asian lesbian migrants to the EU, and Roma lesbians.

## Terminology

As already mentioned above, EL\*C uses the term “lesbian” as inclusive of cis, trans, and intersex women and non-binary persons who self-identify as lesbian, bisexual, and queer. Throughout the report, the terms “lesbian” and “LBQ women and non-binary persons” will be used interchangeably. Sometimes, the phrase “LBQ women” will also be used. This phrasing is not intended to equate non-binary people with people who are assigned female at birth. Instead, it points to patterns of gender-based and racial discrimination that women and nonbinary people are likely to face because they are not cisgender men. The acronyms LBQ and LGBTIQ are used throughout this report. The Q stands for Queer and is used here in recognition of those who may be identified in some contexts as Lesbian, Gay, Bi, or Trans but do not use those specific words to identify themselves for various personal or safety-related reasons, as is frequent in racialized and non-European communities.

This report focuses on racial, ethnic, and religious identities, as well as people with a migration background. As such, it seems essential to define some key terms and avoid confusion.

The term "race" refers not to so-called biological races but to a social construct based on skin color and phenotype (such as hair texture and other physical characteristics) and is often imposed by external classification<sup>5</sup>. “Ethnicity” covers a distinct reality, even if the two terms are often wrongly used as synonyms. It refers to a shared sense of identity and belonging based on common cultural characteristics, such as language, traditions, ancestry, religion, or shared history. Some individuals may identify with multiple ethnicities. In Europe, only the Roma people are categorized as both an ethnicity and a race. However, these two social constructs do not always overlap. Someone can belong to an ethnic group without embodying the physical traits associated with a racial identity. In this report, several mentions are made of Roma lesbians who can or cannot be perceived as being white and the relative privilege or compounded discrimination that ensues.

The word "racialized" is used throughout this report as a shortcut to describe people who are not perceived as white and thus not immediately perceived as belonging to the stereotyped idea of

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<sup>4</sup> Yancy A. (2021), « Equality toolbox: Creating safer spaces for LGBTQI+ people with a migrant background. Introduction”, IOM Belgium, p.12, <https://belgium.iom.int/lgbtqi-toolbox>.

<sup>5</sup> Cornell, S., & Hartmann, D. (2007). *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

what a European citizen should look like<sup>6</sup>. Similarly, due to the fact only Christianity and Atheism are viewed as inherently European<sup>7</sup>, being identified as belonging to a non-Christian religious group, generally based on visible signs such as wearing specific garments or symbols, can also be associated with a racial identity.

Being racialized does not equate to being a migrant. Equating these two concepts reinforces false notions about European identity. Migrants from Central Asia exemplify this well. Indeed, the Central Asian region serves as a crossroads of diverse cultures, religions, and racial identities. For example, a Central Asian participant with Slavic roots and racialized as white recounted instances where EU citizens expressed complaints about migrants to her, unaware that she herself was a migrant.

Therefore, it is important to note that while all the BPOC participants are identified as being racialized at first sight, not all Central Asian and Roma participants share that experience.

Finally, multiple references are made to the notions of institutional and systemic racism; these expressions illustrate the way in which racial inequality is deeply embedded in the systems of our society, referring both to openly discriminatory practices and those that seem to be neutral but repetitively impact certain racialized groups and communities.

## Methodology

To produce this report, EL\*C hired three research teams, each focusing on a specific group of LBQ women and non-binary people. Nadira Masiumova conducted research on Central Asian lesbian migrants in the EU, while Alba Hernández Sánchez and Aldessa Georgiana Lincan researched Roma LBQ women and non-binary individuals living in Germany, Romania, and Spain. Dr. Nat Arias led the research on BPOC lesbians living in the EU, with support from Tania Irias, a lesbian refugee activist and social worker. Each researcher is a member of the communities they studied.

This study applied participatory research methods. Researchers collaborated with a steering committee that was comprised of the communities being interviewed, and their feedback and discussions were incorporated into the research design and analysis.

The researchers utilized a qualitative approach centered on intersectionality, recognizing the interconnections among gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, ethnicity, race, class, occupation, nationality, legal status, language, and age. Data was collected between August and September 2024 through focus group discussions and semi-structured one-to-one interviews. It is worth noting that some participants across the three groups preferred being

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<sup>6</sup> The stereotype of the “European” is a white person who is Christian or non-religious.

<sup>7</sup> Yancy A. (2021), « Equality toolbox: Creating safer spaces for LGBTQI+ people with a migrant background. Training Manual”, IOM Belgium, p.52, <https://belgium.iom.int/lgbtqi-toolbox>



interviewed individually. Some stated safety reasons (fear of surveillance or being outed) for preferring individual interviews. This was especially so for migrants, asylum-seekers, and nonbinary participants among the BPOC study. None of the BPOC participants were interviewed in focus groups.

The participants for this research were recruited through the researcher's existing activist networks, some social media outreach, and subsequently through snowball sampling.

## Demographics

To participate in the research, participants needed to self-identify as Central Asian, Roma, or BPOC lesbians<sup>8</sup>. A substantial number of the participants across the three groups are migrants or asylum seekers, including all of the Central Asian participants.

In total, 55 LBQ women and non-binary persons were interviewed for this study: 15 identified as Central Asian, 15 as Roma<sup>9</sup>, and 25 as BPOC. The participants' age ranged from 18 to above 55. The participants cover a variety of employment backgrounds such as caregivers, social workers, artists, and community organizers. Some of them were unemployed.

As a note, participants are referred to in this report's quotes as they self-identified at the time of the interview.

## Geographic repartition

BPOC participants live or lived in Italy, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, France, Portugal, and Poland. Central Asian participants lived and/or had experience in Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, France, Bulgaria, and the Netherlands and were from five Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Roma participants lived in and discussed Germany, Romania, and Spain.

## Limitations

The study's limited time frame and its aim to include diverse experiences from racialized LBQ women prevented it from offering in-depth analysis for each EU country. However, focusing on participants facing multiple marginalizations – such as queer, transgender migrant women, and Black lesbian refugee mothers — reveals barriers to equality that affect society as a whole.

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<sup>8</sup> For more details, see appendix “Additional notes on Methodology”

<sup>9</sup> Roma is used here as an inclusive political term encompassing several groups including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Gitanos, Kalderash, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Manouches, ...

# ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

## Obstacles to finding employment

Despite the European Commission establishing schemes and laws to promote equality for LGBTIQ people, workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation is still a widespread phenomenon in Europe<sup>10-11</sup>. Emerging studies report that LBQ women in Europe have higher incidences of anti-LGBTIQ workplace discrimination and a predominance of precarious work<sup>12</sup>. Additionally, studies confirm racialized women experiences of racism notably by being “trapped” in low-waged employment or by facing fewer employment opportunities<sup>13</sup>. For example, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) reported that only 16% of Roma women have access to paid work in Europe and that 40% of Roma women felt discriminated against while looking for a job in the past 12 months in Spain<sup>14,15</sup>.

All participants described incidences of discrimination — stemming from their racial or ethnic identity, their gender, and their sexual orientation — occurring in job applications, interviews, and at work. These incidents include stereotyping, lesbophobia, heterosexist and sexual harassment, or dismissals<sup>16</sup>.

*“If you're looking for a job and they see, one, that you're a Black person. It's already very hard to get a job. But if they think you are a lesbian or queer? You just don't get the job. There are very few legal protections. Queer people, and especially for queer [migrant] women face so much more violence”*

*(Black cis lesbian, Spain)*

<sup>10</sup> Lloren A, and Parini L., (2017), “How LGBT-Supportive Workplace Policies Shape the Experience of Lesbian, Gay Men, and Bisexual Employees”, *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 14 (3): 289–99.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-016-0253-x>.

<sup>11</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), (2024), “LGBTIQ Equality at a Crossroads: Progress and Challenges”, EU LGBTIQ SURVEY, Austria. [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2024-lgbtiq-equality\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2024-lgbtiq-equality_en.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Lacatena M., Ramaglia F., Vallone F., Clelia Zurlo M., and Sommantico M, (2024), “Lesbian and Gay Population, Work Experience, and Well-Being: A Ten-Year Systematic Review”. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 21 (10): 1355. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph21101355>.

<sup>13</sup> Cantalini S., Guetto R., and Panichella N., (2022), “The Ethnic Wage Penalty in Western European Regions: Is the European Integration Model Confirmed When Differences within Countries Are Considered?”, *Demographic Research* 46:681–92.

<sup>14</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), (2019), “EU minorities survey: Roma women”, [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2019-eu-minorities-survey-roma-women\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2019-eu-minorities-survey-roma-women_en.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> This number is lower in Romania but still reaches 26% of Roma women.

<sup>16</sup> Gould W, Kinitz D., Shahidi F., MacEachen E., et al., (2024), “Improving LGBT Labor Market Outcomes Through Laws, Workplace Policies, and Support Programs: A Scoping Review”, *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, February. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-023-00918-9>.

*“I went to one of these centers, and they offered me a job as a nanny. I was confused. I have two master’s degrees and speak several languages. I don’t have anything against being a nanny, but it doesn’t align with my qualifications. I doubt they would have made the same offer to a man.”*

*(Central Asian lesbian\* migrant, France)*

This discrimination drives many racialized lesbians into informal employment sectors, where they face increased vulnerability due to a lack of job security and legal protection. One Roma participant shared:

*“I worked in sex work for two years because it was almost impossible for me to find a stable job.”*

*(Roma queer woman, Romania)*

For migrant lesbians, the prevalent issue when trying to access legal employment and fair labor rights is obtaining work permits. The lack of proper legal status or documentation confines many of them to informal, lower-waged precarious jobs.

In Austria and Germany, for instance, many employers explicitly state in their job listings that they do not sponsor work visas. Others are just reluctant to handle the paperwork, leading them to discriminate against LBQ migrants because of their legal status indirectly and instead choose other candidates.

*“I see ten vacancies, and I understand that I am suitable for all ten. But I can apply only for one, simply because it is the only one that does not indicate that they do not provide a visa. And in nine it is already written that they do not provide a work visa. And this is in the non-governmental sector”*

*(Central Asian queer migrant, Austria)*

## Vulnerability to workplace bullying and harassment

The scarcity of suitable and stable job opportunities for racialized, Roma, and migrant LBQ women and non-binary persons makes them extremely vulnerable in the face of workplace bullying and harassment.

For example, dependency on employers greatly exposes migrant workers to bullying and discrimination:

*“You can’t quit because if you do, you’ll lose your visa. The employer knows this and can make you work overtime”*

*(Central Asian queer migrant, Germany)*

*“I got a job at a supermarket and I was constantly being bullied by the other employees there. They did not let me eat my lunch in common areas. One day I was eating a chocolate bar and they accused me of stealing it. And that supermarket didn’t even have that brand of chocolate “*

*(Central Asian lesbian migrant, Germany)*

To avoid abuse, many participants reported concealing as much of their identity as they could from employers and coworkers. Most racialized LBQ women workers in this study reported they were “in the closet” at work because they felt unsafe about disclosing their (other) marginalized identities to employers or worried about workplace bullying or sudden job dismissals if they disclosed their sexual orientation, gender identity, or ethnicity. Participants who are visibly gender non-conforming reported facing significant obstacles and harassment in employment.

Some Roma participants reported that they felt the need to conform to white standards as much as possible to conceal their ethnic identity, and that when they did decide to embrace it at work, discrimination appeared rapidly.

*“When I finally accepted my Roma identity at work, I noticed that I was treated differently by both my employer and colleagues. The discrimination I faced intensified.”*

*(Roma lesbian, Romania)*

Additionally, it is important to underline that for some racialized lesbians, coming out as LBQ, trans\*, or non-binary to their community is not always a priority over preserving their link with it. Some LBQ Roma women reported that when they experience lesbophobia in the workplace,

they are sometimes discouraged from reporting that discrimination out of fear of being outed. Pursuing legal actions might require them to explain their situation to family members, further jeopardizing their emotional, physical, and material safety. As one participant shared:

*"A Roma woman won't report workplace discrimination for being a lesbian because she fears explaining it to her family. Plus, the system is racist, so she has everything to lose"*

*(Roma lesbian, Spain).*

## Consequences of employment discrimination

The marginalization of racialized LBQ women and non-binary persons in the labor market and the informal nature of the jobs available to them amplifies their economic insecurity. Additionally, the lack of a more stable economic situation and educational opportunities traps many in a cycle of poverty and exclusion. The experiences shared by participants reflect the urgent need for targeted policies and interventions that address the intersectional barriers they face.

*"Employment discrimination is a very severe issue for racialized queer and transgender people in Italy. Many trans people cannot get employment or never hear back from job offers after their employers find out that they are trans or gender non-conforming"*

*(Racialized queer trans woman, non-EU migrant, Italy)*

Of course, employment discrimination directly impacts all spheres of life, from access to housing, to access to healthcare and to political participation

The economic exclusion of racialized lesbians also extends to further make them invisible in society. Many Roma participants shared feelings of invisibility, with one stating:

*"The only time people recognize Romani people is when they are begging in the U-Bahn."*

*(Roma queer lesbian, non-EU migrant, Germany)*

This clear statement stresses the dehumanizing stereotype of Roma individuals in Germany, where they are often seen as outcasts, reinforcing their marginalization in both the labor market and broader society. Policy recommendations for addressing employment barriers among racialized LBQ women and non-binary people in the EU are outlined in the concluding chapter of the report, on page 42.

# ACCESS TO HOUSING

## Unaffordable housing, discrimination, and homelessness

Safe and affordable housing is a significant issue for LGBTIQ people, as they are more likely to live in poorer socioeconomic situations. Increased rents and living costs across the EU in the last decades disproportionately impact racialized, Roma, and migrant LBQ women and non-binary individuals. With growing anti-LGBTIQ violence spreading across Europe, housing discrimination and homelessness are also on the rise<sup>17-18</sup>. Racialized, Roma, and migrant LBQ women are likely to encounter compounded discrimination that harms their chances of finding emergency accommodations. They may be excluded due to their race (racial and xenophobic discrimination), sexuality (lesbophobia), and/or gender identity (misogyny or transmisogyny).

The European Union Roma Framework, as part of its strategic goals, urges member states to address housing deprivation among Roma populations, aiming for a reduction of at least one-third by 2030<sup>19</sup>. However, housing remains a persistent challenge for Roma individuals. According to the 2021 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) survey, 24% of Roma participants reported experiencing ethnic discrimination in the housing market within the past five years<sup>20</sup>. While the FRA survey reported no significant gender differences in terms of discrimination experienced by Roma in accessing housing, the interviews conducted for this study indicate that Roma women, particularly LBQ Roma women, encounter specific challenges that intersect with their gender, racial identity, and sexual orientation.

Housing discrimination against racialized, Roma, and migrant LBQ women, especially those who are transgender, was widely reported in this study. Trans and non-binary participants shared accounts of housing discrimination and temporary homelessness, even when they lived in states with state-provided social and affordable housing through welfare programs.

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<sup>17</sup> Pettas D, Arampatzi A., and Dagkouli-Kyriakoglou M., (2022). "LGBTQ+ Housing Vulnerability in Greece: Intersectionality, Coping Strategies and, the Role of Solidarity Networks", *Housing Studies* 0 (0): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2022.2092600>.

<sup>18</sup> ILGA Europe, (2024), "2024 Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe and Central Asia". Belgium: ILGA Europe. [https://www.ilga-europe.org/files/uploads/2024/02/2024\\_full\\_annual\\_review.pdf](https://www.ilga-europe.org/files/uploads/2024/02/2024_full_annual_review.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> European Commission, (2020, October 8), "EU Roma framework: Commission urges Member States to ensure equal opportunities for Roma citizens", European Commission. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_20\\_1813](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1813)

<sup>20</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, (2022, March), "Roma survey: The situation of Roma in 2021", European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2022/roma-survey-findings>

## Sources of discrimination

### *Prevalence of racism*

Discrimination based on visible racial markers, such as skin color or surname, is one of the most significant obstacles for racialized, Roma, and migrant lesbians in renting private housing. This issue is further intensified for those whose racialization, sexual orientation, or trans-identity are visible.

*“Many Black queer and transgender people in the Netherlands (whether born here or migrants) are poor and working-class because of racism and a lack of social mobility. Racist discrimination in housing and employment are extreme issues for Black queer and trans women and non-binary people. Many Black queer women and people are turned away from job interviews and flat viewings because they are Black, and more so if they are visibly trans”*

*(Black queer genderfluid person, The Netherlands)*

Very often racialized people are forced to adjust their presentation and identity to conform to landlords' preferences and adopt different strategies to avoid discrimination as much as possible. Roma and BPOC participants reported sending their white friends, partners, colleagues, or relatives to view flats on their behalf to secure housing offers.

*“To rent the apartment, I’ve always had to go because I speak a different language, I have a different presence (white-passing), and they see that I have a stable job.”*

*(Roma lesbian, Spain)*

Racism is the primary issue when seeking housing. As a result, Roma participants in Romania and Spain reported preferring to look for housing in majority Roma neighborhoods where they declared feeling safer because racial discrimination is less likely. However, this sense of safety often means living in segregated and underfunded areas, where access to essential services as well as other aspects of well-being are sacrificed for security.

### *Obstacles for migrant and refugee lesbians*

The increasingly hostile immigration laws in Europe have made it distinctly more challenging for migrant lesbians to obtain safe and affordable housing. All the participants shared incidences of coming across landlords who openly refused to offer rentals to migrant tenants or would suddenly raise the rental price for potential migrant tenants<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Khaligh, Salimi H., Ahrabare A., and Zobnina A., (2022), “Undocumented Migrant Women in Europe: A Neglected Chapter in Fundamental Rights Protection. Key Observations and Recommendations”. European Network of Migrant Women, <https://usercontent.one/wp/www.migrantwomennetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/UMW-Report-2022.pdf?media=1705347985>.

LBQ refugees who live in shared accommodations within refugee camps, shelters, and other types of communal housing either led by states or NGOs often encounter lesbophobia from fellow residents. Limited resources and legal restrictions for asylum-seekers prevent them from securing independent accommodation on their own. Authorities who allocate housing rarely consider sexual orientation or discrimination by other tenants as grounds for specific protection, leaving them in particularly vulnerable housing situations.

Gender expression is also an important factor to consider safe housing for migrants. As reported by a Central Asian lesbian migrant in the Netherlands, masculine-presenting lesbians often encounter pressure and lack of acceptance from other residents. While some housing authorities are supportive in assisting LBQ women through conflict, there is no protocol in place to prevent discriminatory issues.

*“In the camp, the dormitories are divided into female, male, and family units. When I arrived, they asked which dormitory I wanted: men’s or women’s. I chose women’s, of course, though I assume they asked because of my appearance. Afterward, there was an issue—the girls likely thought I was a man. Three weeks later, I was transferred to another location and placed with a female roommate, which also caused tension. I understand her reaction—she was simply confused. Eventually, I was moved to the third floor, where they house ‘problem’ teenagers. The administration took a long time to decide what to do with me—I am not a problematic person. But the administration always tried to find a solution. Once, they gave me keys for the assistance shower and said I could use it twice a week, as I could not use a common shower with other asylum seekers.”*

*(Central Asian lesbian refugee, The Netherlands)*

In some countries, such as France, housing agencies often require potential renters to demonstrate connections to a French national guarantor in the absence of an established work contract or if they deem wages insufficient. This poses a significant challenge for newly arrived migrant LBQ women, effectively excluding those without established local connections from the wider housing market.

*Even in big cities, locals struggle to find accommodation, so it’s even harder for migrants. Everything takes time—they check your file, your documents, who your employer is, your salary. Even if you have money in your account, that’s not enough. You also need a guarantor, a French citizen, without whom it’s impossible to rent a place*

*(Central Asian lesbian\* migrant, France)*

### *Accessible information*

Lack of information about tenant's rights is another flagged issue for racialized, Roma, and migrant LBQ women and non-binary individuals<sup>22</sup>. The absence of sexuality- and race-based protections in tenancy laws for EU residents makes it exceptionally challenging for racialized transgender and migrant LBQ women and non-binary persons to obtain safe housing.

### Forms of housing discrimination

Housing discrimination for racialized, Roma, and migrant LBQ women takes various forms and practices.

Nearly all participants of this study reported that landlords either refused to rent their properties or rescinded their housing offers after meeting with them; some participants declared that hidden fees are often used to discourage racialized, Roma or migrant tenants.

*"In Italy, it is not illegal to refuse (...)to rent out a property to someone based on their race and sexuality. We need laws to protect against racist discrimination in housing. Racism is the largest barrier to safety for Black lesbians in Italy. While it is not safe for most queer people in Italy, it is even more unsafe for racialized people whose Black and brown skin marks them as 'targets' for violence in Italy"*

*(Black lesbian, Italy)*

Access to housing was identified as particularly challenging in Germany. Germany has one of the most regulated rental markets, with strong tenant protections. Despite these regulations, housing ownership is highly concentrated, with half of the country's housing stock owned by the wealthiest 10%. In Berlin, 57% of apartments are investment properties owned by a small group of multimillionaires, while only 15% are owner-occupied. The roots of this issue date back to the post-1989 reunification, when public housing and land were heavily privatized, often sold in large packages to investors rather than individual tenants<sup>23</sup>.

With many applicants often competing for a single apartment, landlords can select a "suitable" tenant at their own discretion. While landlords rarely state outright that they prefer European tenants, their choice can easily be influenced by race or sexual orientation without it needing to be explicitly stated. In some cases, however, exclusion is more direct. A Central Asian focus group participant shared that landlords sometimes asked non-German speakers to leave immediately

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<sup>22</sup> TENLAW, (2015), "TENLAW: Tenancy Law and Housing Policy in Multi-Level Europe", 2015, <https://www.uni-bremen.de/jura/tenlaw-tenancy-law-and-housing-policy-in-multi-level-europe/reports/reports>.

<sup>23</sup> Perković J, (2022), "Assemble Papers media outlet. The fight for stable homes during Berlin's rental crisis", <https://assemblepapers.com.au/2022/03/08/behind-the-great-housing-crisis-of-berlin/>

during apartment viewings. Although this practice is illegal, it continues to occur, leaving affected individuals with little legal recourse.

*"It's not as bad as in Russia where they write that housing is rented only to Slavs. But if you are German or European, finding housing is easier. For example, you find out that they rented an apartment to an American, a white person. And you can't say that it is discrimination, because they can say that "we are more suitable for each other"."*

*(Central Asian queer migrant, Germany)*

Some participants also raised the issue of housing safety and the right to privacy. One participant described how her landlords would repeatedly "warn" potential tenants about the presence of a lesbian couple next door:

*"The neighbor next door, when renting out his apartment, always asks the tenants if it bothers them that there's a lesbian couple living next door. He asks everyone, almost as if he's warning them about something bad"*

*(Roma bisexual woman, Spain)*

It is imperative to reflect on the landlord's intentions in this situation. His objective is to find tenants for the unit, not to deter them. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that mentioning and sensationalizing the couple's sexual orientation aims to attract potential renters. By repeatedly highlighting the participants' sexual orientation, he turns the couple into objects of exotic curiosity. This contributes to the objectification, dehumanization, and the hypersexualization of lesbians within a heteropatriarchal context, and it reinforces societal bias and stigma. This violation of privacy constitutes lesbophobic harassment and could endanger the couple in question.

## Risks and rising homelessness

One of the most obvious consequences of housing discrimination is homelessness<sup>24</sup>. It is difficult to confirm exact figures on LBQ women's homelessness in Europe because there is a general absence of national and regional data on LGBTIQ homelessness in the region and underreporting due to stigma and discrimination. However, according to the 2021 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) survey, 52% of Roma households across EU countries experience housing deprivation. LBQ women who experienced homelessness reported that even when temporary accommodation could be found, they still feared or had to endure racism and lesbophobic (or transphobic) discrimination when seeking formal housing support. Workers who

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<sup>24</sup> Homelessness can include people living on the streets, in emergency shelters, or in temporary accommodation (e.g., sleeping in a car or squatting).

are most likely to be the first point of contact in homeless support services - such as social workers, government municipal offices, and local nonprofit organizations - often lack antiracist and LGBTIQ supportive education and training.

*“It is so difficult for transwomen - especially transwomen of color - to find safe housing or employment in Italy. Many places will not hire or rent out to trans people. This means that racialized and migrant trans women are especially vulnerable to exploitative landlords ... For us, homelessness is even more dangerous because there are very few public shelters that are safe for transgender women of color or trans migrants”*

*(Racialized queer trans woman, Italy)*

To date, less than 50 homeless shelters across Europe are publicly LGBTIQ shelters<sup>25</sup>. Online grassroots efforts are made to identify and share information about shelters that have good practices for LGBTIQ residents to support LGBTIQ people facing homelessness<sup>26</sup>. In response to the growing racial violence against racialized LGBTIQ people, grassroots collectives are beginning to address racist and anti-LGBTIQ housing discrimination locally. However, these community-led initiatives are primarily managed by racialized queer individuals who themselves are both organizers and living in precarious conditions<sup>27</sup>. Policy recommendations for addressing these findings are outlined in the concluding chapter of the report, on page 42.

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<sup>25</sup> Baiocco R., et al. “LGBT+ Training Needs for Health and Social Care Professionals: A Cross-Cultural Comparison Among Seven European Countries.” *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, vol. 19, no. 1, Mar. 2022, pp. 22–36. *Springer Link*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-020-00521-2>.

<sup>26</sup> <https://rainbowelcome.eu/map/>

<sup>27</sup> Baiocco R., et al. “LGBT+ Training Needs for Health and Social Care Professionals: A Cross-Cultural Comparison Among Seven European Countries.” *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, vol. 19, no. 1, Mar. 2022, pp. 22–36. *Springer Link*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-020-00521-2>.

# ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

Participants across all groups widely reported racism, sexism, lesbophobia, and transphobia in their healthcare experiences. Studies also highlights that bisexual women consistently encounter poor outcomes in physical and mental health<sup>28</sup>. When issues like professional misconduct and discrimination against racialized, Roma, and migrant LGBTIQ people in health and social care settings are primarily framed as purely “anti-LGBTIQ” or class-based discrimination<sup>29</sup>, we risk underestimating the role that racism undeniably plays in restricting racialized people’s access to healthcare. The Disqo Stakeholder Network<sup>30</sup>, led by EPHA<sup>31</sup>, has been calling upon decision-makers at all levels, including the European Commission, to recognize and address racism as a fundamental determinant of health since 2023<sup>32,33</sup>. In doing so, it is raising attention to the fact that despite racism being well-acknowledged in the UK and in the USA, as well as being the object of some research in the European Union<sup>34</sup>, it is still not recognized as a major barrier to accessing healthcare and improving wellbeing in the EU. According to the FRA’s 2021 report, 14% of Roma participants reported feeling discriminated against when accessing health services in the 12 months prior to the survey<sup>35</sup>. This research deepens and widens these statistics as all of the participants in this study reported racial discrimination when trying to access healthcare. Our findings clearly indicate that racism is a significant barrier to lesbian healthcare in the EU.

## Racism as a barrier to accessing healthcare

Racial discrimination in healthcare settings manifests in various times of the healthcare journey and in various forms, including verbal abuse, hostile language, disbelief, and a lack of trust towards racialized, Roma, and migrant LBQ women.

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<sup>28</sup> Maliepaard, E. (2018), “Introduction to the Special Issue: EuroBiReCon: (Inter)National Research Frontiers.” *Journal of Bisexuality*, 18(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2018.1421307>

<sup>29</sup> Baiocco R., Pezzella A., Pistella J., et al. (2022), “LGBT+ Training Needs for Health and Social Care Professionals: A Cross-Cultural Comparison Among Seven European Countries”, *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 19 (1): 22–36. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-020-00521-2>.

<sup>30</sup> <https://epha.org/campaigns/disqo-thematic-network/>

<sup>31</sup> European Public Health Agency

<sup>32</sup> Disqo Network, “Organisations across sectors call for stronger action against racism and discrimination to achieve health equity”, Joint statement, 22/05/2023, <https://epha.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/disqo-joint-statement.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Disqo Network, *Consultation report and recommendations for the post-2025 EU Anti-racism Action Plan* in “The Right to Health of People of African Descent: Part 2 of the Racism, Discrimination and Health Series”, 2024, [https://epha.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/240802\\_disqo\\_event\\_consultation\\_report.pdf](https://epha.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/240802_disqo_event_consultation_report.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> Devakumar D., Selvarajah S., et al., (2022), “Racism, Xenophobia, Discrimination, and the Determination of Health”, *The Lancet* 400 (10368): 2097–2108. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(22\)01972-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(22)01972-9)

<sup>35</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) (20,19), “The second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey: Roma women in nine EU Member States.”, [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2019-eu-minorities-survey-roma-women\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2019-eu-minorities-survey-roma-women_en.pdf)

Sometimes, racial discrimination in healthcare even occurs during initial assessments by receptionists and other administrative gatekeepers. BPOC participants, for example, have reported incidences of staff members doubting their legal status as EU residents based on their racial identity<sup>36</sup> and subsequently demanding additional and unnecessary administrative formalities as part of their registration. Such “improvised” administrative requirements can result in significant delays in appointments or even unjust refusal of treatment, further exacerbating health inequalities for racialized lesbians and impacting their chances of receiving timely and quality medical care. These exclusionary practices are an example of how the hostile climate towards migrants in Europe affects racialized LBQ women and non-binary persons.

Similarly, participants reported feeling discredited by healthcare providers who doubted their identities as lesbians, transgender, or non-binary individuals based on their racial identity. The inability to perceive racialized people as diverse human beings with a wide range of sexualities, gender identities and gender expression is one of the ways racism functions. Indeed, racism produces a “flattened” or monolithic image of racialized people based on stereotypes.

*“I think that in Italy, it is still not possible for people to imagine, “queer” as also, like a migrant or racialized [woman]. There is still this huge stereotype that if you are from Morocco, or if you wear Hijab, you cannot be a queer woman because ‘those women cannot choose.’”*

*(Muslim lesbian, Italy)*

This refusal to acknowledge sexual identities, combined with racial profiling and transphobia, has discouraged participants from seeking formal healthcare. Participants noted that doctors were less inclined to take their symptoms of pain, gender dysphoria, or mental distress seriously due to racial biases. This treatment and subsequent avoidance of formal healthcare settings have particularly dire consequences for participants who are disabled. The lack of trust between racialized LBQ patients and healthcare professionals should also raise concerns in the development of specific healthcare protocols related to lesbian or transgender healthcare.

Racial stereotyping has dramatic consequences on racialized LBQ patients’ health. Racial bias towards Black patients, in particular, has been shown to lead to poor treatment, wrong diagnosis, and higher risks of worsened health outcomes and even death during routine procedures and perinatal care<sup>37</sup>. Infantilization and dismissal of racialized, Roma, and migrant patients is very common and was reported by several participants.

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<sup>36</sup> Discrimination is most often based on assumptions by the discriminatory party rather than fact. Racial markers are often wrongly used to identify those who “look like migrants”. As explained in details in the terminology section of the introduction (p.7), not all racialized individuals are migrants and vice versa.

<sup>37</sup> Hoffman K. M., Trawalter S., Axt J. R., & Oliver M. N., (2016) "Racial bias in pain assessment and treatment recommendations, and false beliefs about biological differences between Blacks and whites.", *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 113(16), 4296–4301.

*"It's the infantilization of migrant women and the fact that the people who work in the hospital think that you are stupid and you are not able to take care of the baby. It's so hard. And even more, if you are a queer racialized woman"*

*(Black lesbian asylum seeker, Spain)*

Similarly, many Roma lesbian participants from Spain reported instances of racial stereotyping affecting the quality of the care they received and their emotional, psychological, and physical safety.

*"When you go to the doctor for a routine check-up or for a cold, you find the doctor lecturing you about how Roma people don't know how to take care of themselves."*

*(Roma bisexual woman, Spain)*

*"When you go to the doctor, you often find yourself thinking about how you will be treated, who you will encounter as a doctor, and you go in with fear of being violated because it has happened to you before. If it's not happened to you, it's happened to your cousin or mother. I have had experiences in gynecology where, for example, I was denied the option to change from a male doctor to a female doctor. I am very shy and feel uncomfortable and vulnerable with a stranger examining my most intimate areas. If you add to that the presence of two unknown men watching me while I am naked, it feels very violent to me. I know you have the right to request a change of doctor if you ask for it, because my non-Roma friends have been given that option, but I was not because I am Roma. When I refused to undress in front of two men, they told me, 'You Roma women who don't want male doctors to see you because your culture doesn't allow it. Nothing is wrong with you; just go home'. It has nothing to do with our culture, it's a matter of feeling safe and comfortable."*

*(Roma bisexual woman, Spain)*

Moreover, there is a persistent pattern of segregation and unequal treatment in healthcare facilities, such as in public hospitals where LBQ Roma women report often being placed together in separate hospital wards or rooms to accommodate other patients' racial bias.

*"When I was hospitalized due to my pregnancy, the patient I shared the room with requested a room change upon seeing that I was Roma. But that wasn't the worst part for me; it was the fact that the nurses validated her racism by accommodating her demands and moving her to another room. Public state workers must implement anti-discrimination laws, rather than perpetuating structural racism"*

*(Roma lesbian, Spain)*

All the participants in this research recognized racism as being the primary obstacle they face when trying to access healthcare. Some even declared often trying to conceal their sexual orientation out of fear of further mistreatment.

## Mental healthcare

When accessing mental health care, participants widely reported a profound lack of trauma-informed care and LGBTIQ-inclusive medical training tailored to cater to the needs of LBQ women and non-binary individuals, as well as institutional discrimination by medical and mental health providers throughout Europe.

BPOC participants shared numerous instances in which they felt racism and sometimes transphobia resulted in misdiagnoses of aggressive behavioral or personality disorders. Many reported that even initial consultations led them to be labeled as “irrationally hostile”, “aggressive”, or “paranoid” by their mental health providers. This aligns with US-based studies on the prevalence and impact of racial biases within clinical and psychiatric medicine<sup>38,39</sup>. Some racialized LBQ women shared that discussing the effects of racist microaggressions — referring to the cumulative impact of subtle racial discrimination — caused their doctors to prescribe invasive psychiatric treatments, which were later found to be inappropriate. This perpetuates a long history of medical racism, as racialized female patients, particularly those identified as Black, are more likely to be medically labeled as aggressive, receive treatment shaped by racial stereotypes, or have their mental health concerns dismissed by clinical providers<sup>40</sup>.

*“We are missing in a lot of health and mental health studies, especially when it comes to racism in mental health care. I mean, there is nothing about racialized queer folks. I think there's also a lot of education and knowledge missing when it comes to understanding our trauma”*

*(Black queer genderfluid person, Germany)*

BPOC lesbian participants also reported facing exclusion due to a lack of queer-inclusive mental health services. Many noted that there are very few, if any, queer mental health practitioners available across the seven countries examined in this research. Where queer-inclusive mental health providers were found, they tended to be private practitioners who required participants to pay out-of-pocket fees for counseling services, which were often financially inaccessible for

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<sup>38</sup> Parsons S., (2020), “Addressing Racial Biases in Medicine: A Review of the Literature, Critique, and Recommendations”. *International Journal of Health Services* 50 (4): 371–86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020731420940961>.

<sup>39</sup> Amutah C., Greenidge K., Mante A., Munyikwa M., et al., (2021), “Misrepresenting Race — The Role of Medical Schools in Propagating Physician Bias”, *New England Journal of Medicine* 384 (9): 872–78. <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMms2025768>.

<sup>40</sup> Devakumar D., Selvarajah S., et al., (2022), “Racism, Xenophobia, Discrimination, and the Determination of Health”, *The Lancet* 400 (10368): 2097–2108. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(22\)01972-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(22)01972-9)

them. Participants emphasized the importance of peer support groups, particularly for racialized disabled LBQ women, to help navigate state welfare systems as well as racism and lesbophobia within healthcare and mental healthcare services.

LBQ trans women are particularly impacted by the issues reported above as many EU countries require psychiatric evaluations as part of accessing often life-preserving gender-affirming care.

## Sexual and reproductive health

We know that many medical professionals in the European Union generally lack knowledge about the differences in sexual and reproductive health for lesbian, bisexual, and queer women and non-binary individuals<sup>41</sup>. However, the compounded impacts of race and ethnicity on racialized LBQ women and non-binary persons are understudied.

The lack of qualitative research both into Roma women and Roma lesbians' specific healthcare access across Europe, particularly in sexual and reproductive health, perpetuates this cycle of invisibility. Much of the available research focuses on adolescent pregnancies among Roma women, often within a preventive framework, which obscures the broader spectrum of reproductive health issues and discrimination they encounter. The near absence of concern for equal access to healthcare due to racist discrimination in this research corpus is indicative of the way sexual and reproductive rights are approached and monopolized by mainstream research centers. Indeed, Roma sexual and reproductive health is mostly studied by non-Roma researchers and handled solely as an issue to solve rather than a right to access. It also concerningly builds upon a history of forced sterilization of Roma women. LBQ Roma participants have reported numerous occurrences of gynecological and obstetric violence and racism. Unnecessary cesarean sections, invasive gynecological exams, and procedures performed without informed consent were described as regular occurrences. One participant shared:

*"A very high number of the women in my family who have given birth have done so by cesarean section, with all the risks that it entails. This is a way to violate our reproductive rights and, of course, to restrict the number of children we can have, as you can only safely have three cesareans; the fourth poses a significant risk to the mother, including the risk of death. It is a common practice among doctors to prevent us from having more children."*

*(Roma lesbian, Spain)*

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<sup>41</sup> EL\*C (2022), "A bitter pill to swallow. Gaps And Discriminations In Healthcare For Lesbians", <https://europeanlesbianconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/ELC-SUBMISSION-IE-SOGI-health1.pdf>

Black and racialized participants in this study noted that deficiencies in queer-inclusive and cultural sensitivity were especially evident for racialized LBQ women seeking to start a family using assisted reproduction technologies.

*“... experiencing fertility treatment as a Black lesbian woman is an especially lonely journey. In addition to the very high costs of treatment, there is very little guidance or support for queer women and even less for queer women of color in Europe.”*

*(Black cis lesbian, France)*

As campaigns for more affordable fertility treatment gain more political acknowledgment as equality issues for LGBTIQ individuals in Europe, barriers related to class and ethnicity remain unaddressed for BPOC LBQ women at the beginning of their fertility journey. Participants also shared evidence of a shortage of Black donors in fertility treatment, along with a wider lack of cultural awareness regarding race and sexuality in these contexts.

## Gender-affirming care

Racism uniquely creates barriers to accessing trans-specific healthcare among racialized LBQ women and nonbinary people. Although technically available in several EU countries, gender-affirming care remains highly inaccessible for racialized, Roma, and migrant lesbians<sup>42</sup>. This is due to several intersecting barriers, such as the effects of hostile migration policies in healthcare, the high costs of treatments, and the long waitlists for the few clinicians supporting transgender patients, which force many to wait months or even years before finally receiving gender-affirming care from their public health systems. In the meantime, their well-being, employment opportunities, and general safety are critically jeopardized. Waiting times are especially detrimental to young racialized trans people, who face threats to their safety due to their racial and gender identities as well as increasing legal challenges limiting their access to trans-specific healthcare.

Racialized, Roma, and migrant LBQ transgender and non-binary individuals reported facing severe discrimination, racism, and transphobia in their interactions with medical and psychological providers. The ongoing pathologization of trans identities, xenophobia, and the rising misinformation about gender and sex characteristics—especially from the anti-gender movement—create particularly formidable barriers for trans lesbians seeking healthcare<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> Adams N., Ganesan D., (2023), The State of Trans-Specific Healthcare in the EU: Looking Beyond the Trans Health Map 2022. TGEU. <https://www.tgeu.org/files/uploads/2023/11/TGEU-Trans-Health-Map-Report.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> Bhatt N., Cannella J., and Gentile J., (2022), “Gender-Affirming Care for Transgender Patients”, *Innovations in Clinical Neuroscience* 19 (4–6): 23. [https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9341318/pdf/icns\\_19\\_4-6\\_23.pdf](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9341318/pdf/icns_19_4-6_23.pdf)

*“I think that health is something really difficult to access in Italy, for queer people but more for trans people. Because our government is really attacking and aggressive to queer people in general, but more [towards] trans people”*

*(Racialized queer trans woman, non-EU migrant, Italy)*

The difficulties reported above are especially concerning because psychological diagnoses are often essential for individuals who wish to initiate an administrative or medical transition, where legally permissible in the EU. It is worth mentioning that these psychological diagnoses are considered as outdated by the relevant actors.<sup>44</sup>

Accessing gender-affirming care, such as hormone replacement therapy, can be especially challenging for trans migrants. However, some participants did share some positive experiences, specifically in Austria, where treatment was described as “easily accessible” and partially covered by insurance. Others described easy access in the Netherlands, where a psychologist specializing in transitioning was available in a refugee camp along with a translator.

## Case study 1: The experience of BPOC, Roma, & migrant Lesbians in Germany

BPOC, Roma, and migrant participants based in Germany shared alarming situations as they reported facing significant obstacles in accessing general and mental health services. Some of their barriers stemmed from the complexities of the state insurance system. They reported difficulties obtaining appointments, doctors refusing to perform necessary tests or provide adequate consultations, challenges in obtaining accurate diagnoses, experiences of racism, stereotyping and discrimination from healthcare workers, and ineffective treatment plans.

One Central Asian migrant participant shared that it took her an entire year and consultations with multiple doctors to receive a diagnosis. In addition to experiencing difficulties in securing an appointment, each doctor refused to conduct the necessary tests. Ultimately, she had to return to Central Asia to undergo medical tests, and receive a diagnosis that allowed her to continue treatment in Germany.

Additionally, the increase in xenophobic and transphobic violence in Germany has led many participants to avoid seeking healthcare in certain geographic areas due to fears of racist and transphobic violence.

Accessing medical services is even more complicated for refugees living in camps, as appointments must be arranged by a social worker responsible for administrating, transportation,

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<sup>44</sup> The World Professional Association for Transgender Health de-pathologized transgender identities as part of international Standards of Care for Transgender patients in 2018. <https://wpath.org/publications/soc8/chapters/>

and facilitating the visit. This makes access to healthcare indirect and highly dependent on the relationship between the LBQ refugee and their social worker. In addition to both parties often not speaking the same language, participants shared that some social workers seemed uninvolved and uncaring. One participant mentioned that her fellow camp resident experienced acute abdominal pain but could not receive medical attention for an entire week due to these obstacles with her social worker. Another participant stated that she had to threaten the staff with a report to the Red Cross to secure the appointment she needed:

*When you live in a camp, you can't just go to a doctor, you go to a social worker. And there are very few of them from Central Asia here. Even if there are some, they are often homophobic. I had a toothache for three days; my face was swollen. I went to make an appointment with a doctor, and the social worker told me: it's too late, we'll make an appointment tomorrow. And then they still didn't make an appointment (...). They think that refugees are spineless, and weak and that no one can do anything. When I said that I would go and contact the Red Cross with a complaint, then they started to react.*

*(Central Asian queer refugee, Germany)*

Many noted that healthcare professionals lacked cultural sensitivity and empathy, that they felt stereotyped, and that their complaints were frequently dismissed by administrative and medical staff, resulting in feelings of frustration and neglect when navigating the healthcare system, leading some to avoid seeking medical support altogether

*"When I go to the doctor, I often feel judged and misunderstood. It's like they don't see me as a whole person, just as a stereotype."*

*(Roma queer lesbian, non-EU migrant, Germany)*

*"Sometimes I hear things from white queer folks, and what they experience is so different... It's this kind of chain: If you're sick and you can't work, you don't have an income. In theory, you should receive money from the state. But in practice, you actually don't receive money because the bureaucracy is so intense. And then you also can't explain [your situation] to the people in the housing [support services] system, because they don't get what it means to be queer and black. Because they don't [admit to] racism in Germany ..."*

*(Black disabled queer nonbinary person, Germany)*

*"I talked to a (...) psychologist who listened to me for two minutes and then said that I just needed to take more antidepressants (...). In Germany, you have to say you're dying. Before that, they just don't help"*

*(Central Asian queer migrant, Germany)*

Accessing mental health care in Germany as a racialized LBQ woman or non-binary person in Germany is not only challenging but potentially traumatizing. Few therapists specialize in providing trauma support services or in assisting queer and transgender clients. One participant, a disabled Muslim lesbian, shared that she had tried to make appointments with over 100 therapists within her regional network of approved mental health specialists. More than 20 therapists had turned her away because she has ‘complex’ health conditions (where ‘complex’ referred to having more than one mental health condition). Participants noted that racialized transgender mental health clients are often classified as having “complex” mental health issues simply for identifying as transgender and being a person of color. The fear of stigmatization from mental health professionals caused some participants to forgo necessary, sometimes life-saving, mental health treatment. Racialized LBQ non-binary participants reported experiencing severe instances of racial discrimination and denials of their gender identities from therapists who tried to misdiagnose their non-binary gender identities as severe personality disorders.

There is a strong demand for, and a significant shortage of culturally sensitive and queer-friendly mental health practitioners equipped to support racialized LGBTIQ individuals in Germany. BPOC participants emphasized that training and establishing a “queer-of-color” mental health network could help address the inequities faced by racialized lesbians; however, prejudice against racialized and ethnic communities, coupled with social immobility, makes it exceptionally challenging for LBQ women and non-binary persons of color to enter careers as clinicians or mental health professionals in Germany. Currently, the educational pathways for becoming a mental health practitioner in Germany primarily serve middle-class nationals. High tuition costs and low wages during mandatory job placements create systemic barriers for individuals without sufficient income to enter or sustain careers in mental health.

**Making German mental health care more inclusive would require substantial institutional changes and a greater allocation of scholarships specifically for queer people of color.**

## Police violence in healthcare settings

Since the 2008 global recession, austerity measures have significantly reduced funding for public healthcare and education while increasing resources for police presence in health and public care settings<sup>45</sup>. Participants shared anecdotal evidence of rising police violence against racialized individuals in healthcare and mental health facilities in Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Italy. The potential for racial police violence in less visible settings — such as hospitals or mental

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<sup>45</sup> Thompson V., (2021), “Policing in Europe: Disability Justice and Abolitionist Intersectional Care”, *Race & Class* 62 (3): 61–76. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396820966463>.



health institutions – was a common deterrent for racialized LBQ women seeking care in these countries, particularly those who are racialized as Black. As monitoring of police violence and violence against the LGBTIQ community predominantly focuses on incidents in public spaces, the less visible nature of these facilities makes them especially threatening, as they do not receive the same level of attention, leading to numerous cases of abuse.

Policy recommendations for addressing barriers in healthcare, including on police violence are available on p.43.

# POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The expression “Political participation” has various meanings, especially when examining the access of multi-marginalized groups. Very often, we assume that political participation implies participation in electoral politics. However, electoral politics remain inaccessible for many racialized, Roma, and migrant LBQ women and non-binary persons, especially in the role of candidates. Asylum seekers and refugees, as well as “undocumented” migrants are often excluded from the electoral process due to legal related factors such as the lack of proper documentation to access local and national elections. Additionally, because racialized, Roma, and migrant lesbians are more likely to experience poverty, they are less likely to have the time and the capital necessary to run for office.

Data from EL\*C Observatory on lesbophobia<sup>46</sup> shows that visible activists and women in positions of power - especially those who do not conform to gender norms or heterosexuality - are specifically targeted by extreme misogynistic and sexist violence. This violence occurs online and offline, in the form of hate speech, harassment, media-driven violence, and physical attacks. Discriminatory targeting, through continuous and organized hate crimes and hate speech, has a deterrent effect on lesbians who are in positions of power as well as those considering entering public life or activism. The general failure to acknowledge the widespread racism, xenophobia, sexism, and anti-LGBTIQ hostility against elected racialized and Roma LBQ women (outside and within national political parties) has led many participants to withdraw from the political sphere due to ongoing experiences of harassment and discrimination.

All of this explains why, during the initial research phase of this report, each of the three research groups focused on different interpretations of the expression “Political participation”. Therefore, the data collected reflects these interpretations and will be presented as case studies. Roma lesbians mostly engaged in the topic of representation in elected office. In contrast, Central Asian participants, most of whom were ineligible for election due to migration-related issues, focused on political mobilization through protests and demonstrations. BPOC lesbians, on the other hand, focused mostly on community-building and grassroots organizing to tackle shrinking spaces for political participation due to racial discrimination within mainstream LGBTIQ and feminist organizing spaces, which will be the object of the next chapter.

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<sup>46</sup> EL\*C (2024), “Observatory on lesbophobic violence and discrimination against lesbians- 2023”, <https://lesbiangenius.org/its-2024-and-lesbophobia-is-still-raging/>

## Case study 2 - Navigating marginalization: Roma lesbians in Spain, Germany, and Romania in electoral politics

The absence of Roma MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) after the 2024 elections highlights a crucial gap in representation for the Roma community at the EU level. This gap could lead to neglecting Roma-specific issues in policy-making<sup>47</sup>.

This lack of representation extends to different political levels, especially when it comes to Roma lesbian representation. If Romania, for example, has Roma women representation in local politics, there is no known Roma LBQ representation at any level of politics in the country.

This absence in both local and national political spheres make it even more difficult for Roma lesbians to engage authentically in the political process. Especially as they face pressure to conform to a certain image to be considered “respectable enough for politics”. A participant in the focus group shared:

*“Even if they have the necessary education, they would still be confronted with racism, sexism, and homophobia and would not be able to present their authentic identity.”*

*(Roma lesbian, Romania)*

They are continuously expected to “whiten” their identity or adopt a heteronormative image and conform to mainstream, conservative expectations to gain acceptance in both Roma and mainstream parties.

*“If you’re willing to take on a populist discourse, embrace icons, and present yourself as heterosexual, then yes, you can make a career in politics”.*

*(Roma lesbian, Romania)*

When there are some Roma lesbians in politics, like in Spain, their lesbian identity remains invisible, and they have so far been confined to specific Roma institutional spaces such as the State Council for Roma People and the Roma Culture Institute. Despite holding decision-making positions within their own communities, they encounter anti-Roma sentiments from non-Roma peers, indicating a significant lack of acceptance and visibility in broader political contexts. The participant underscores the need for continued efforts to elevate the voices of Roma lesbian

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<sup>47</sup> The Brussels Times, (2024), “Roma minority will be unrepresented in the incoming European Parliament”, <https://www.brusselstimes.com/1090324/roma-minority-will-be-unrepresented-in-the-incoming-european-parliament>

women, asserting that progress is more evident within Roma spaces compared to dominant institutions.

*“As for our political participation as Roma lesbians or even as Roma, it is only within the Roma institutional spaces where we Roma women are in decision-making positions; but outside of that we have no representation, we are not allowed to enter those spaces. I have suffered anti-Roma comments from my non-Roma peers within the dominant institutional space, even knowing that I was in the room, they don't care. There is still a lot of work to be done to give visibility to Roma lesbian women, we are working on it, but I would say that in Roma political spaces, we are more advanced than in the dominant ones.”*

*(Roma lesbian, Spain)*

Of course, representation is not enough, especially as the inclusion of Roma lesbians and Roma women in political spaces is often limited to tokenistic roles rather than genuine decision-making opportunities and platforms to influence policies or decisions.

*“The participation of lesbian Roma women and Roma women in general is very limited in political spaces, they want to have us among them but only for the photo, as a symbol of their inclusion, but they will never give us the space for decision making. It doesn't matter where it is, if the space is left, center or right, if it is a political party at local or national level, if it is within the labor unions. There is no real participation of Roma lesbian women.”*

*(Roma lesbian, Spain)*

If in Spain, the only Roma lesbian representation is within Roma institutions, in Germany, participants expressed disappointment about the lack of Roma representation in key political offices, such as the Anti-Gypsyism office. Despite the adoption of the EU Roma and Sinti Strategy and the appointment of an anti-Gypsyism commissioner in Germany, one of the participants critiqued:

*“...he's not even of Romani descent.”*

*(Roma queer lesbian, non-EU migrant, Germany)*

This situation highlights a bigger problem with representation in decision-making roles. It is clear that having just one representative of a specific community doesn't account for the diversity within these communities, especially the specific needs of LBQ Roma women, whose voices are diverse and often overlooked in these structures. Additionally, Roma representation is often limited by the belief that non-Roma people are seen as more qualified to make decisions about Roma policies. This view further excludes Roma people, especially Roma women, from having a real say in decisions that affect their lives.

## Case Study 3 - Mobilizing through protests and demonstrations: Central Asian Migrant Lesbians

Central Asian migrant lesbian participants all reported low levels of political participation because, on the one hand, they felt comparatively safer to express their queerness in the EU than in Central Asia and are aware that the situation is significantly worse in other migration destinations such as Russia. On the other hand, the lack of citizenship and fear of jeopardizing their visas or residency status deters many Central Asian lesbians from engaging in political activities. This sentiment is echoed by Roma and BPOC migrant participants, emphasizing the lack of accessibility to the political sphere and the precarious status of asylum seekers, refugees, and undocumented individuals

Central Asian participants in Germany and Austria had much to share about the accessibility of protests and demonstrations as a form of political participation. They noted that they can generally participate much more freely in LGBTIQ and feminist demonstrations, such as in Pride and women's marches, than they could in Central Asian countries, even if violence may still occur during these events.

However, there was a unanimous agreement that attending protests related to Palestine, both in Germany and in Austria, poses significant dangers. Migrants and refugees fear losing their visas, facing deportation, and encountering police violence.

*"I didn't go to pro-Palestinian protests because if I went there, they (the authorities) could charge me with anti-Semitism, and when you fill out documents for citizenship, you can't get it if you have several articles (pending legal charges). In this regard, I am sad, I mean, why do I need Pride if I can't just go and show solidarity for the rights of people who are dying?"*

*(Central Asian queer refugee, Germany)*

*"I went to protests against the war in Ukraine, to Pride, and to demonstrations on March 8 (International Women's Day). The last time I joined a pro-Palestinian protest, my friends warned me: 'You're not from the EU. Maybe you shouldn't go because here they can jail protesters, and then you'll have a record that could follow you across EU countries.' After that, I stopped going. I was afraid of having a criminal record, and I wonder if others are also afraid for the same reason"*

*(Central Asian queer migrant, Austria)*

This situation has led to some feelings of insecurity and concern about the existence of police brutality within the EU.

# GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

## Navigating Intersections: Challenges in Mainstream Community Organizations

Community-based organizations are an essential support element across Europe. Community-based structures were reported as essential in facilitating access to legal advice, employment, housing, healthcare, and political participation.

However, the participants in this study reported some challenges in accessing most local or regional community organizations because of a lack of intersectionality in their approaches, racism and discrimination, and even issues with meaningful engagement due to tokenization.

### Lack of intersectionality

Mainstream community organizations tend to be organized in silos, typically focusing on either racial, ethnic or religious rights, gender equality, or LGBTIQ issues. This approach leads to many issues. For example, participants provided examples of how legal and migrant advice centers differentiated between the rights of LGBTIQ couples, the rights of migrants and refugees, and the rights of survivors of partner violence. As a result, queer migrant survivors of violence often find themselves navigating multiple support services that may offer conflicting advice. Stronger collaborations between legal professionals and community organizers are needed to better address the diverse needs of **people with multiple marginalized identities who simultaneously exist in** different groups.

*"There's a lot of focus on marriage equality, but there's very rarely focus on other political issues that are important to me and my community – like housing access and poverty"*

*(Black queer nonbinary person, Portugal)*

Some organizations, however, decide to embrace an intersectional approach. Still, many participants raised concerns about the precise understanding of this concept. Intersectionality is often found to be misunderstood or misused.

*"They remove the most important part of the concept, the ethnic or racial part. They take out of context the relationship between identity and systems of oppression. Intersectionality does not exist without a system of oppression."*

*(Roma lesbian, Romania)*

For example, LBQ Roma participants expressed discomfort with how privileged groups, such as white, gay, or lesbian individuals, claim to understand and embody intersectionality despite not experiencing racial discrimination themselves. The mental and emotional work of advocating within these spaces is significantly uneven. Roma lesbians frequently experience alienation, as the intersectionality of their identities—race, gender, and sexual orientation—is often dismissed or treated superficially:

*“They say we’re all victims, that we all suffer equally, but when it comes to our unique struggles, they don’t make room for us.”*

*(Roma lesbian, Romania)*

## Racism and discrimination within LGBTIQ and feminist organizations in Europe

Racial biases within LGBTIQ organizing were widely reported across all the countries covered in this study. Nearly all participants shared experiences of racial discrimination within LGBTIQ organizations. This finding echoes critiques by queer of color activists and scholars who feel that LGBTIQ progress in Europe has been achieved at the expense of racial and ethnic communities<sup>48,49</sup>. Several participants felt that LGBTIQ organizations across Europe need to engage with interfaith and ethnic organizations more actively.

*“For the larger LGBT (organizations), it feels like there’s a lack of representation that also leads to informal segregation inside LGBT spaces, and a lack of accessible information and opportunities for racialized [LBQ] people interested in politics”*

*(South Asian queer nonbinary person, Italy)*

For example, BPOC participants in Spain, France, the Netherlands, and Portugal reported that although there are laws against discrimination based on race, racialized LGBTIQ individuals and migrants still face challenges in accessing legal advice, information, and community support from LGBTIQ organizations.

Many racialized, Roma, and migrant LBQ women felt that their local or regional LGBTIQ organizations were complicit in perpetuating harmful stereotypes about ethnic, racial, and

<sup>48</sup> Haritaworn J., (2012) “Women’s Rights, Gay Rights and Anti-Muslim Racism in Europe: Introduction”. *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 19 (1): 73–78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506811426384>.

<sup>49</sup> Fremlova L., (2020), “LGBTIQ Roma and queer intersectionalities: The lived experiences of LGBTIQ Roma”, *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, 3(3), 426-442, <https://doi.org/10.1332/251510819X15765046909970>

religious minorities. Some shared anecdotes about LGBTIQ organizers who refused to collaborate with ethnic and racialized groups due to racial biases, like assuming that these groups are “inherently homophobic”. Roma, Black, and Muslim cultures, for example, are often depicted as “more patriarchal” and homophobic than white society, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and excluding racialized lesbians both from the dominant mainstream narratives and from LGBTIQ spaces, which tend to advocate based on white experiences.

*“Even among feminist political groups there are prejudices and I felt uncomfortable. They don't take our experience seriously, they might say something racist. I left [that space].”*

*(Central Asian queer migrant, Germany)*

*“It's really important for people that want to incorporate religion and queerness, especially when it comes to Queer women who practice Islam, there are so many issues about our racialization and discrimination but it's extremely hard to find LGBT+ spaces that understand us”.*

*(Muslim Lesbian, Italy)*

*“If you are white-passing, you might experience some privilege, but if you're visibly Roma, you'll face discrimination, even in queer spaces.”*

*(Roma queer nonbinary person, Germany)*

*“There was Pride, and our entire Central Asian group went to the club, but they didn't let us in, except for two of our group. Out of ten people, they let in two who were white.”*

*(Central Asian queer migrant, Germany)*

## Meaningful engagement and tokenization

The tokenism mentioned in the earlier section on electoral politics also exists in community spaces. The Roma participants from all three countries covered by the research described their experience with being included in discussions without engaging in meaningful ways, limiting their access to community and participation in advocacy efforts.

*“I never feel welcome in these spaces because I'm not white... when they try to be inclusive, it's obvious that we are an afterthought.”*

*(Roma nonbinary lesbian, Spain)*

*“They call us in, send emails, and pressure us to participate... but we're just ticking a box. ‘Look, we have Roma, lesbians, feminists represented,’”*

*(Roma lesbian, Romania)*

This exclusion from key advocacy discussions perpetuates cycles of marginalization, leaving these women unsupported by movements that claim solidarity and equality for all. This lack of representation contributes to a “survival mode” mentality, focusing on navigating daily life rather than advocating for systemic change.

## The importance of multi-marginalized community-based organizations

The issues highlighted above in the Political Engagement and Grassroots Advocacy and Community Organizing chapters have led to the necessity of creating specific intersectional spaces, usually led by multi-marginalized community members. Community-based organizations play a crucial role in supporting LBQ asylum seekers, for example. LBQ refugee participants highlighted that they received vital information and assistance from NGOs based in their hosting countries and LGBTIQ organizations from Central Asia with which they had contact or previous connections with. In Germany, unique Central Asian initiatives have emerged, offering safe environments for LGBTIQ migrants. Although these initiatives are new and often operate with limited resources, they are favored by Central Asian lesbian migrants thanks to their acceptance of diverse identities.

The BPOC research highlighted that many racialized LBQ women and non-binary people are increasingly turning to community organizing. Some are doing so as they withdraw from the political sphere. They noted that community organizing allows them to build closer political and personal relationships, which in turn helps them find guidance and support for navigating barriers. In this context, international alliances were reported as critical facilitators for accessing political participation. Many participants spoke about the positive impact of connecting with queer-of-color organizations in other countries as being transformative. They found that international collaborations introduced new strategies and revealed new possibilities for healthcare, education, and building more inclusive communities. Black queer events, such as ‘Black Pride Amsterdam’, are an excellent example of a political organization that mobilizes for improving Black lesbians living and material conditions.

*“When I had the possibility to attend a training course and meetings about building community, starting from my community of racialized people, it was so powerful for me. It helped me to imagine something so different”*

*(Black lesbian, Poland)*

*“When I first found queer BIPOC spaces, they started from (...) a collective need. Other LGBT spaces forget to connect with the world, but to me, you cannot be in a struggle and not connect*

*with the world around you, without queer migrants and refugees. When I found queer BIPOC [community-organizing], I thought, 'We are here! And there are better ways'" –*

*(Black lesbian, Italy)*

Unfortunately, many governments and municipalities that previously provided funding schemes for social care and LGBTIQ support services —such as shelters, mental health programs, and NGOs for community-building— are rapidly losing both funding and political support. Among EL\*Cs policy recommendations for supporting political participation p. 45, developing local skills in grant writing is essential for racialized queer community organizers. This includes offering the basics of capacity-building for community organizing, such as knowing where to find grant opportunities, understanding the fundamentals of documenting impact and, and learning how to meet foundation or nonprofit status requirements across the EU.

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Cross-cutting barriers

As this report has shown, there are some cross-cutting barriers reducing or even preventing access to employment, housing, healthcare, and political participation for racialized, Roma, and migrant lesbians.

**Racism** is the most prevalent source of discrimination for racialized lesbians. Many participants indicated they had to employ various strategies to avoid or lessen the discrimination they encountered. Among these strategies are asking acquaintances who can pass for white to attend appointments in their place or to attend with them and modifying one's appearance to adhere as closely as possible to cultural and aesthetic standards of whiteness (such as straightening hair and avoiding ethnic-coded clothing and religious symbols).

The **misunderstanding or “whitewashing” of the concept of intersectionality** and the unwillingness to recognize the overwhelming presence of racism and xenophobia in the EU negatively impacts racialized, Roma, and migrant lesbians. Intersectionality is often used as a synonym for diversity or considering every possible factor of discrimination except race, rendering invisible the very people for whom the concept was created. The consequences are evident in all the areas addressed in this report. The existing legal frameworks, for example, are far too challenging to navigate. Historically, anti-discrimination laws have been crafted with consideration for only one factor of discrimination at a time, such as gender, race, or sexual orientation. This means that those who exist at the intersection of multiple identities often slip through the cracks, becoming either invisible or poorly protected from the compounding effects of intersectional discrimination.

The **lack of data** has also consistently been identified as a main issue preventing racialized, Roma, and migrant LGBTIQ women from fully accessing employment, housing, healthcare, and political participation. Data collected in the EU is generally not sufficiently disaggregated and often focuses on single axes of identity (such as race or migration) while neglecting the compounded experiences of discrimination and systemic inequities faced by multi-marginalized individuals. This results in the invisibilization of the specific hurdles that LBQ women face, even more so when they are racialized, Roma, migrants, or otherwise marginalized. Empirically, the lack of nuanced, intersectional data in Europe perpetuates biases in study designs and policy frameworks and can contribute to further erasing certain marginalized groups or spreading harmful misconceptions.

The **lack of funding** represents another significant barrier. There is now overwhelming evidence that the lesbian movement is critically underfunded<sup>50</sup>. Due to its position between LGBTIQ and feminist movements, LBQ women often find themselves dismissed by both groups on the assumption that the other movement is addressing their needs. Additionally, since 2008, austerity measures have drastically reduced public healthcare and education funding, redirecting resources toward increased policing. This shift has disproportionately impacted marginalized groups, further limiting their access to essential services. Finally, governments and municipalities that once supported LGBTIQ-focused initiatives, such as shelters, mental health programs, and community-building NGOs, are now experiencing widespread funding cuts and declining political support.

### Policy recommendations for cross-cutting barriers:

- 1. Mainstream anti-racism into all frameworks:** Explicitly acknowledge that racism is a cross-cutting issue affecting access to all resources, including employment, housing, healthcare, and political participation, and not a separate issue to be handled in isolation.
- 2. Reduce social segregation:** Develop policies to address the social segregation of racialized, Roma, and migrant communities, with targeted outreach to ensure equitable access to housing, education, and healthcare.
- 3. Strengthen intersectionality and inclusivity within the existing policies and legislations:** Ensure all members—particularly racialized, Roma, and migrant lesbians—receive adequate support and resources to thrive by fostering connections between the different units and divisions working on equality, such as LGBTI issues, migrant support, anti-racism, anti-Roma discrimination.
- 4. Strengthen the accessibility of intersectional legal advice for racialized, Roma, and migrant lesbians:** Support legal advice projects working on matters related to migration laws and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. Encourage approaches to legal protection using a holistic approach considering personal experience and intersecting discrimination.
- 5. Support research on racialized, Roma, and migrant LBQ women:** Ensure that research and data collection efforts that focus specifically on lesbians are implemented and funded by national and international actors, and that such research specifically addresses racialized, Roma, and migrant lesbians' specific needs and barriers in accessing employment, housing, political participation, and healthcare

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<sup>50</sup> In 2021-2022, of over 900 million dollars awarded on LGBTI issues, only 2-3% has been dedicated specifically to LBQ women: Global Philanthropy Project (2024), 2021–2022 Global Resources Report: Government & Philanthropic Support for LGBTI Communities [https://globalresourcesreport.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GRR\\_2021-2022\\_WEB-Spread-Colour\\_EN.pdf](https://globalresourcesreport.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GRR_2021-2022_WEB-Spread-Colour_EN.pdf). For more detailed information, see study from Mama Cash, Astrea (2022), Vibrant yet under-resourced: The State Of Lesbian, Bisexual, And Queer Movements: [https://fundlbq.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Astraea\\_MamaCash\\_LBQ\\_Report\\_VDEF-v2-SPREADS.pdf](https://fundlbq.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Astraea_MamaCash_LBQ_Report_VDEF-v2-SPREADS.pdf)

6. **Strengthen data collection on violence and discrimination against racialized, Roma, and migrant lesbians:** Ensure that all incidents of discrimination against racialized, Roma, and migrant lesbians are properly and effectively recorded. This requires that disaggregated statistics on hate crimes, hate speech, and discrimination are collected, analyzed, and disseminated, and that more studies and research specifically examining this phenomenon receive funding.
7. **Improve and simplify access to funding racialized, Roma, and migrant lesbians:** Simplify application and reporting processes when providing financial support to multi-marginalized groups.

## Employment

Racialized, Roma, and migrant LBQ women in Europe face widespread workplace discrimination, including stereotyping, harassment, and relegation to low-wage or informal jobs unrelated to their qualifications. Discriminatory hiring practices and lengthy procedures to obtain a work visa and the consequent reluctance of employers to sponsor legal documentation exacerbate their economic insecurity. Many endure abusive conditions or conceal their identities to avoid discrimination, while Roma women face particularly severe exclusion and low employment rates. These intersecting barriers perpetuate poverty and marginalization, underscoring the need for urgent policy interventions.

### Policy recommendations for employment:

1. **Promote education and economic inclusion:** Ensure that racialized, Roma, and migrant LBQ women are target groups in programs providing vocational training and higher education programs and that institutional attention is given to support the specific difficulties faced by migrants and trans people.
2. **Streamline visa processes:** Simplify labor visa procedures for migrants to facilitate their access to legal employment.
3. **Support inclusive hiring practices:** Rethink visa procurement procedures for employers and strengthen employers' capacity to provide access to stable employment for LBQ migrants.

## Housing

Racialized, Roma, LBQ women face severe challenges in securing safe and affordable housing in Europe due to intersecting forms of discrimination rooted in race, gender, and sexual orientation.



Rising housing costs and anti-LGBT+ sentiment exacerbate this crisis, leaving many vulnerable to homelessness, unsafe housing conditions, and heightened vulnerability to violence.

### Policy recommendations for housing:

1. **Combat housing discrimination:** Strengthen anti-discrimination laws and expand protective public housing programs with a focus on inclusivity for multi-marginalized individuals, including racialized, Roma, and migrant lesbians.
2. **Enhance support to shelters and other GBV-focused organizations:** Increase funding and infrastructure for shelters that cater specifically to racialized, Roma, and migrant lesbians, as well as for organizations that provide support services for racialized, Roma, and migrant lesbian survivors of violence and hate crime.

## Healthcare

Racialized, Roma, and migrant lesbians in Europe face widespread healthcare discrimination, including administrative hurdles, treatment delays, and medical abuse. Healthcare professionals often dismiss their symptoms or identities, discouraging many from seeking formal care. Mental healthcare is particularly inaccessible, with racialized LBQ women and non-binary individuals frequently misdiagnosed due to racial and gender biases, high costs, and a lack of culturally sensitive, queer-inclusive providers. Roma women and BPOC lesbians report instances of gynecological violence and inadequate support for assisted reproductive treatment. At the same time, migrants and refugees encounter systemic barriers such as administrative dependency, xenophobia, and a general lack of material resources. The presence of police in healthcare settings adds another layer of fear and mistrust, particularly for those racialized as Black or perceived as migrants. These structural inequities leave LBQ women vulnerable and underserved. Systemic reforms and targeted measures are urgently needed to address the racism and discrimination embedded in Europe's healthcare systems.

### Policy recommendations for healthcare:

1. **Invest in queer-of-color mental health professional network:** Provide funding, scholarships, and support to develop networks for queer clinicians, therapists, and mental health practitioners of color.
2. **Remove law enforcement agents from healthcare settings:** Eliminate law enforcement presence in healthcare settings and fund community-based mental health first-response training to address police violence.
3. **Support disabled racialized LBQ individuals:** Increase funding for community-led peer support initiatives which can lead to more responsive public health education tailored to

queer racialized disabled people. Facilitate affordable, accessible spaces for peer-led support and community events.

4. **Improve health services for racialized and Roma patients:** Provide funding to racialized community-led organizations training healthcare providers on intersectionality, racial bias, and the specific needs of racialized, Roma, and migrant LBQ women and nonbinary individuals to reduce stigma and ensure queer-inclusive, culturally sensitive care. At the state level, facilitate the reporting process of health professionals and institutions who have demonstrated racist, transphobic, and lesbophobic behaviors. Such reporting is highly beneficial as it highlights areas where LGBTI and culturally-inclusive education, training, and political support are needed to support LBQ patients.
5. **Support the depathologization of gender-affirming healthcare:** Support research projects investigating the experiences and needs of young racialized LBQ trans women and nonbinary people in Europe.
6. **Empower racialized, Roma, and migrant LBQ women and non-binary persons:** Adopt intersectional frameworks promoting leadership and decision-making roles, challenging harmful stereotypes, facilitating cross-movement alliances, and dedicate funding for tailored programs and support services.

## Political participation, Advocacy, and Community Building

This study finds that the political participation of racialized, Roma, and migrant LBQ women and non-binary people is shaped by formal electoral politics, grassroots advocacy, and community mobilization. Systemic barriers like poverty, restrictive migration laws, and intersectional discrimination make formal political engagement largely inaccessible. This is worsened by violence against visible activists, further discouraging involvement.

In this research, various groups shared different approaches to political participation. Roma LBQ women emphasized the need for political representation but faced barriers of racism, sexism, and lesbophobia. Where representation exists, it is often tokenistic or limited to Roma-specific institutions, reducing their impact in mainstream politics. Meanwhile, some Central Asian lesbian migrants found protests more accessible for engaging with feminist and LGBTIQ issues. However, fears of sudden deportation or visa issues hinder their participation in sensitive movements, such as protests supporting Palestine. Lastly, BPOC lesbians worked through the above-named issues by primarily engaging in grassroots advocacy and community-based organizing for solidarity, support, and global involvement alliances.

At the community level, racialized, Roma, and migrant LBQ women and non-binary people face significant challenges when navigating mainstream organizations. The lack of intersectionality, persistent racism, and tokenistic engagement often leave them feeling disconnected from social

movements that claim to support them. As a result, multi-marginalized individuals increasingly create their own spaces, where they can address their unique needs and build collective power. These intersectional, community-led initiatives are crucial for providing essential support and advancing the political and material conditions of their communities.

### Policy recommendations for improving political participation, advocacy and community building:

- 1. Support racialized and Roma lesbian human rights defenders and politicians:** In legislation concerning participation in democratic processes, address the freedom of the press, protection of human rights defenders, and the specific experiences of violence faced by racialized and Roma lesbian politicians and human rights defenders.
- 2. Empower racialized, Roma, and migrant LBQ women and non-binary persons:** Adopt intersectional frameworks promoting leadership roles (including paid internship opportunities), challenging harmful stereotypes, facilitating cross-movement alliances, and dedicate funding for tailored programs and support services. Facilitate the access to multilateral spaces at the EU level for small NGOs.
- 3. Improve access to community organizing for racialized, Roma, and migrant LBQ women:** Financially support organizations providing grant-writing training and developing toolkits to help grassroots organizations secure funding and sustain long-term initiatives.
- 4. Reduce economic burdens on racialized LBQ community organizers:** Ensure adequate, accessible, and reliable funding for projects and activities implemented by organizations focused on and led by racialized, Roma and migrant lesbians. This should also include smaller structures, grassroots groups, and projects that are designed to counter racist and lesbophobic rhetoric and narrative, to provide local training to law enforcement and judicial authorities, as well as to ensure assistance and support for the racialized, Roma and migrant LBQ survivors of discrimination and violence

## Specific policy recommendations for migrants and refugees.

Migrants and refugee LBQ participants have also highlighted their vulnerability. While many arrive seeking refuge from lesbophobia, they encounter new forms of discrimination related to citizenship, ethnicity, race, and religion once in the EU. Xenophobia, anti-migrant sentiment, and rising far-right rhetoric exacerbate their marginalization, instilling fears of losing residency and being forced to return to dangerous situations. Language barriers worsen their exclusion. Limited access to multilingual resources and dismissive attitudes from officials further obstruct their ability to navigate services. This situation is especially dire in refugee camps, where a shortage of



social workers, emotional burnout, and inadequate mental health support leave refugees isolated and exposed. Testimonies reveal critical gaps, such as delays in psychological care and hostile environments within camps, which have, in some cases, led to tragic consequences. LBQ migrants also face exclusionary immigration laws, in addition to extra obstacles across the themes examined in this report.

### Policy recommendations to improve support to LBQ migrants and refugees.

- 1. Streamline migration processes:** Reduce bureaucratic barriers to access visas (including humanitarian and work visas), ensure transparency and justification for any procedural delays, and allow family reunification for lesbian couples.
- 2. Improve LBQ migrants' physical safety in refugee camps:** Implement plans to prevent violence, discrimination, and isolation of LBQ migrants by providing safe accommodation structures, including non-mixed settings, single rooms, and LGBT-friendly housing solutions.
- 3. Safely break language barriers for migrant lesbians.** Ensure that non-lesbophobic, biphobic, and transphobic interpretation services are available to enable claimants to share their stories without fear of further discrimination or violence after disclosing their identities.
- 4. Improve the efficiency of migration officials in supporting migrant lesbians:** Financially support organizations providing training to migration officials to improve their understanding and the way they address the specific challenges faced by LBQ migrants. This will foster empathy and reduce bias and combat legal pressure for LBQ migrants to fit in Eurocentric narratives.
- 5. Strengthen mental health support to LBQ migrants in refugee camps:** Streamline access to mental health providers in refugee camps and investigate suicides to address systemic mental health failures.

# APPENDIX

## Additional notes on Methodology

### BPOC Demographics and Limitations

#### *Demographics*

In total, 25 interviews were conducted with participants from the following countries: Italy (8), Spain (6), Germany (5), the Netherlands (3), France (1), Portugal (1), and Poland (1). Their gender identities varied and included 14 cis-gender women, 3 transgender women, and 9 nonbinary people. Among the interviewees, 9 identified as lesbians, 7 as bisexuals, and 9 as queer.

Participants self-identified with the following ethnic profiles: Black/Afro-descendant, Mixed race, Arab, Muslim, Asian, indigenous, and Latin American. Eleven participants identified as Black. Of the total interviews, 11 participants self-identified as migrants from outside of the EU, including 5 LBQ asylum seekers. At least 12 of the BPOC participants hold an EU citizenship.

The interviews were conducted in three different languages: 8 in Spanish, 4 in Italian, 13 in English. The English and Spanish interviews were led by native speakers, the Italian interviews were simultaneously translated by a steering committee member who joined the interview sessions.

The employment backgrounds varied and included BPOC LBQ women who worked as caregivers, social workers, artists, community organizers, as well as those who were unemployed.

In terms of age, 14 BPOC participants were in their 20s (20-29), 9 were in their 30s (30-39), and 2 were in their 40s.

Researchers also recruited racialized LBQ women with hidden and visible disabilities. Among the participants, 10 BPOC LBQ participants also identified as having a chronic disability.

#### *Limitations*

The study's limited time frame and its aim to include diverse experiences from racialized LBQ women, it was unable to offer in-depth analysis for each EU country. However, by focusing on participants facing multiple marginalizations – such as indigenous queer transgender migrant women and black lesbian refugee mothers — reveals barriers to equality that affect society as a whole.

## Central Asian Demographics and Limitations

### *Demographics*

Fifteen Central Asian migrants participated in the research. The countries examined in the study are Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, France, Bulgaria, and the Netherlands. Some of the participants answered questions about different contexts as they had the experience of living long-term in several countries. In total, 6 participants talked about life in Germany, 5 about Austria, 2 about Czech Republic, 2 about France, 1 about Bulgaria, and 1 about the Netherlands. Among the 15 participants, 10 have visas based on occupation, 2 are asylum seekers, 1 has obtained an EU citizenship. Two participants currently reside in Central Asian countries. They work in local and regional NGOs and support LBQ migrants from Central Asian countries.

In terms of racial identity, all of the participants are racialized except one with Slavic roots. All of the interviews were held in Russian.

The study involved women of different ages; 5 were in their 20s (20-29), 7 were in their 30s (30-39), and 2 were in their 40s, and 1 above 55. One participant is a trans woman. Among the participants, 2 identified as lesbians, 1 identified as homosexual, 2 as bisexuals, 1 as asexual, and 6 as queer. Three participants identified as LBQ.

Participants' levels of education ranged from having no formal education to higher education degrees. Some were employed, others were unemployed, occupied in informal or precarious work.

None of the participants declared having disabilities, some did mention mental health issues.

### *Limitations*

There is a significant lack of data collected on queer migrants from Central Asia, with existing studies focusing mainly on HIV transmission, and, since in Central Asian countries LBQ women are not covered by HIV programs, this data excludes them. However, LBQ women living with HIV remain invisible and understudied. The widespread misconception that LBQ women do not face health risks related to HIV is incorrect and misleading.<sup>51</sup>

Data on migrant women generally lacks a breakdown by sexual orientation or gender identity, failing to capture the specific challenges and barriers faced by queer women in migration contexts. Existing data on LBQ women from Central Asia typically do not encompass migrant women specifically. All of this underscores the critical necessity of conducting further studies to

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<sup>51</sup>Logie C, James L, Tharao W, Loutfy M., (2012), 'We don't exist': a qualitative study of marginalization experienced by HIV-positive lesbian, bisexual, queer and transgender women in Canada", <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3494165/>

address and fill this significant gap in understanding Central Asian LBQ women from migrant backgrounds.

This study includes participants from five Central Asian countries: *Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan*. East Turkestan, currently occupied by China, is a sub-region of Central Asia. Although this study does not cover East Turkestan due to its specific limitations, it is crucial to acknowledge its connection to Central Asia. Highlighting this often-overlooked territory within an already underrepresented region helps increase its visibility.

The recruitment process was challenging due to the small size of the LBQ Central Asian community in the European Union, and was exacerbated by difficulties in obtaining visas and residence permits. As a result, recruiting participants required significant time and effort. The researcher aimed to reach a sample size of 15 participants to provide a comprehensive overview.

## Roma Demographics and limitations

### *Demographics*

The participant sample consisted of 15 LBQ Roma women, selected to reflect a diversity of perspectives within urban, advocacy, and community spaces. Participants included 4 individuals from Romania, 8 from Spain, and 3 from Germany, with recruitment efforts prioritizing self-identified lesbian, bisexual, queer, and non-binary voices to capture the multiplicity of LBQ Roma women identities across different socio-political landscapes. Out of the 15 participants, 3 identified as non-binary, and all the others identified as cis women. Six of the participants identify as lesbians, 4 as bisexual, 5 as queer. Four of the participants are migrants, 3 of them migrated from within the EU, 1 from a non-EU country.

In terms of age, 3 Roma participants were in their 20s (20-29), 7 were in their 30s (30-39), and 5 were in their 40s.

Socioeconomic backgrounds varied, with a significant number of participants coming from low-income households. There was also notable diversity in educational and employment status, with 12 participants employed<sup>52</sup>, 2 studying and 1 is unemployed. Three participants identified as having a chronic disability, some also declared some mental health issues.

In Romania, a focus group discussion was held with three Roma women from Bucharest and Timișoara, each actively engaged in local activism and advocacy surrounding Roma rights, women's issues, and broader LGBTIQ+ matters. In addition, an in-depth interview was conducted with a younger Roma woman who identified as queer, providing insights that highlighted

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<sup>52</sup> 10 full time employed, 1 freelancer, 1 part-time employed

generational and community-specific nuances, especially as she chose to share her perspective outside of a group setting. The interviews were conducted in Romanian.

For the Spanish sample, three individual interviews and two paired sessions were conducted online, including one involving a couple. The Spanish participants identified as Gitanas<sup>53</sup> and reported experiences of internal migration within Spain, relocating to major cities such as Málaga, Madrid, Valencia, Cartagena, and Alicante. Most were professionally involved in Roma organizations and gender equality councils, marking a high level of engagement with intersectional community work. The interviews were all conducted in Spanish except for one in English.

In Germany, data collection included an online interview with two participants: a Roma queer woman and a non-binary Roma lesbian, both with migration backgrounds and currently based in Berlin. Their perspectives and experiences provided valuable insights into their activism and advocacy within Germany's sociopolitical landscape. Additionally, to gain a deeper understanding of the situation in Germany, an individual interview was conducted with a lesbian Roma woman from Berlin. The interviews were all conducted in English.

### *Limitations*

This research faced significant limitations in reaching LBQ Roma women from rural areas and low-income households. Although recruitment efforts included targeted outreach to these demographics, responses were limited, resulting in no participants from rural areas. However, a small portion of participants did come from lower-income backgrounds, which contributed some socioeconomic diversity to the sample.

Efforts to organize larger group discussions were further hampered by participants' work schedules, particularly in Spain and Germany, where many individuals were unable to commit to focus group discussions due to time constraints. This limitation highlights the challenges of engaging marginalized communities whose members often juggle multiple responsibilities.

Contextual factors likely played a critical role in this limited engagement. The current sociopolitical climate in Germany is characterized by a rise in far-right influence and incidents of targeting minorities, which have contributed to heightened fears among LBQ Roma individuals. Recent reports indicate that racism manifests in both overt acts and systemic discrimination, impacting marginalized communities and fostering mistrust of formal institutions<sup>54</sup>. Such

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<sup>53</sup> The participants in Romania and Germany identified as Roma

<sup>54</sup>Bundesregierung. (2023), "Reem Alabali-Radovan legt Lagebericht Rassismus vor.", <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/rassismus-2156976>



environment may have influenced participants' willingness to engage in one-on-one interviews rather than focus groups, especially when discussions involved sensitive or personal experiences.

Additionally, the lack of prior research on intersectional issues specific to LBQ Roma women resulted in minimal secondary data to help contextualize the findings of this study. This scarcity of existing literature reflects a broader trend in which intersecting identities—such as race, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression—within marginalized groups are often underrepresented in research. This gap in the literature limited recruitment strategies by reducing the availability of existing networks, organizations, or studies focusing on LBQ Roma women that could have facilitated participant outreach. Similarly, it constrained data mapping by providing fewer frameworks, comparative studies, or intersectional analysis tools on the specificity of LBQ Roma women to structure and interpret the findings, making the process exploratory and emphasizing the need for more comprehensive research in this area.

# NOTES ON CENTRAL ASIAN LBQ MIGRATION

Central Asia is a complex and diverse region. While Central Asian countries share similar historical, political, and socio-cultural backgrounds, they are far from monolithic. Attitudes towards queer people vary significantly. For instance, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan still criminalize same-sex sexual relations between men, whereas Kyrgyzstan made progress in 2018 by including sexual orientation and gender identity as protected characteristics in a draft anti-discrimination law. Despite the widespread presence of homophobia, lesbophobia, transphobia, and political attacks against queer people across all Central Asian countries, the level of access to justice, legal support, health care, and the right to association varies considerably.

Russia is the predominant migration destination to all Central Asian countries. Factors contributing to this include familiarity with the Russian language and the absence of a visa requirement between these countries. However, Russia is not the preferred destination for LBQ women. Lesbians face systemic discrimination and high levels of violence, prompting many to migrate in search of better safety, protection, and quality of life. When they can, they seek environments where they can freely and openly express themselves<sup>55</sup>. An assessment of the needs of LBQ women from Kyrgyzstan<sup>56</sup> highlighted that almost half of the participants had experienced violence and discrimination. More than half of those participants indicated that they experienced depression and stress due to the high levels of violence against lesbians.

In recent years, anti-gender legislation has been actively promoted in Russia. Measures include rejecting legal gender recognition, enacting laws on foreign agents, labelling the international LGBT movement as “terrorist”, and banning “LGBT propaganda”<sup>57</sup>. These policy initiatives have influenced similar measures across Central Asia. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, the legal gender recognition was eliminated in 2020, followed by the adoption of the so-called “anti-LGBT

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<sup>55</sup>UN Women, (2023), “Migration experiences of people with diverse SOGIESC”. Policy paper, [https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/policy-paper\\_migration-experiences-people-diverse-sogiesc-en.pdf](https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/policy-paper_migration-experiences-people-diverse-sogiesc-en.pdf)

<sup>56</sup> Labrys, Kyrgyz Indigo, 2017

<sup>57</sup> Ilga Europe (2024), « Annual review of the human rights situation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex people covering the period of January to December 2024”, [https://www.ilga-europe.org/files/uploads/2024/02/2024\\_russia.pdf](https://www.ilga-europe.org/files/uploads/2024/02/2024_russia.pdf)

propaganda law” in 2023, and a nearly identical foreign agents law in 2024<sup>58</sup>, all mirroring Russian legislation. Kazakhstan has also considered legislation against “LGBT propaganda” in 2024<sup>59</sup>.

Generally, while Russia is still the primary destination, migration patterns are evolving, with an increasing number of migrants choosing to migrate to the European Union. Between 2016 and 2019, there was a notable 14% rise in Central Asian citizens obtaining work, study, or residence permits in the EU.

Other factors have recently influenced the migration corridor from Central Asia to Russia in this way. Foremost among these is the military invasion of Ukraine, which altered the economic landscape, weakened the Ruble against Central Asian currencies, and intensified nationalist and chauvinist sentiments in Russia. In 2024, following a terrorist attack in Moscow, there was a surge in hate crimes targeting Central Asian migrants, along with increased law enforcement raids, migrant detentions, and stricter border controls<sup>60</sup>. Several Central Asian foreign ministries even advised their citizens against traveling to Russia unless necessary<sup>61</sup>.

A popular destination for Central Asian migrants is Germany, which is rated second-highest receiving country (after Russia) in terms of the number of migrants from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan after Russia. Germany is the third country of destination for Turkmenistan<sup>62</sup>. While the data show the total flow of migrants without separating them by SOGIESC, a special focus on Germany as a country in the study is highlighted.

However, it is important to note that Central Asian citizens must obtain a Schengen visa to enter the European Union. This limits lesbians seeking refugee status from applying for asylum inside the EU. Consequently, they are often forced to apply for refugee status in transit countries, which frequently have high levels of homophobia, lesbophobia, transphobia, and discrimination.

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<sup>58</sup> Radio Liberty media outlet, (2024), “Law Targeting Foreign-Funded NGOs Sends Chill Through Kyrgyz Civil Society”, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-foreign-agents-chill/32893000.html>

<sup>59</sup>Viktoriya K., (2024), “Kazakhstan Should Reject Attempt to Curtail LGBT People’s Rights. Human Rights Watch”, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/07/10/kazakhstan-should-reject-attempt-curtail-lgbt-peoples-rights>

<sup>60</sup>BBC media outlet (2024), “Moscow attack: Central Asian migrants hit by backlash in Russia”, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-68665896>

<sup>61</sup>RFE/RL’s Russian Service media outlet, (2024), “Tajikistan Advises Citizens To Avoid Traveling To Russia”, <https://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-terror-crocus-russia-migrants-travel/32923733.html>

<sup>62</sup> IOM, (2024), World Migration Report, <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2024>



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