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# Under the European Asylum Rainbow: Intersectional Queer Challenges

4<sup>th</sup> July 2019, Goethe University (Festsaal), Frankfurt am Main



## Conference Report

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This international conference brought together LGBTQI+ refugees and people seeking asylum, NGO workers, activists, lawyers, researchers, students and other interested parties to discuss the current situation of LGBTQI+ refugees in Germany and across Europe, and to stimulate the exchange of knowledge and experience. The 120 participants who attended the conference came from different regions in Germany, the UK, Italy and other parts in and outside Europe (such as Thailand).

Taking a comparative, queer and intersectional perspective, the conference explored what the current needs and challenges are for LGBTQI+ refugees (and support groups), what we can learn from 'good' and 'bad' practice and what political changes need to be made. The conference had an interactive format, consisting of individual presentations, podium discussions and moderated theme tables.

It was organized by [SOGICA](#) (University of Sussex) in cooperation with [Prof. Dr. Uta Ruppert](#) and the [Cornelia Goethe Center for Women and Gender Studies](#) at the Goethe University Frankfurt, and in collaboration with [Rainbow Refugees Frankfurt](#), [Hessischer Flüchtlingsrat](#), [LeTRa München](#), [Kölner Flüchtlingsrat](#) and the [UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group](#).

The conference was further funded by the [Office for Multicultural Affairs](#) of the city of Frankfurt am Main (Amt für multikulturelle Angelegenheiten – AmKA), the [School of Law, Politics and Sociology](#) at Sussex University and the [Friends' Association](#) (Foerderkreis) of the Cornelia Goethe Centre for Gender and Women's Studies. The generous funding received made it possible that the registration for the event was free, lunch provided and travel for refugee participants paid. Furthermore, some very generous accommodation offers by individuals meant that we could provide accommodation for refugee participants who came from afar.

Feedback received after the conference suggested that it had been a great success. Participants appreciated especially the interactive format and the equal and safe space created, which offered for everyone the opportunity to participate in the discussions and share experiences about challenges faced. Participants also liked the intersectional and comparative approach and to hear from experiences with queer asylum in the UK and Italy. It was an interesting, informative and stimulating day that raised important conversations and created new friendships.

**Under the European Asylum Rainbow: Intersectional Queer Challenges**  
*4<sup>th</sup> July 2019, Goethe University, Festsaal*

**Programme**

9.30 – 9.45	<b>Registration</b>
9.45 – 10.00	<b>Professor Uta Ruppert</b> – Faculty of Social Sciences/ Cornelia Goethe Centrum, Goethe University Frankfurt, <i>Welcome</i>
10.00 – 10.20	<b>Professor Vitit Muntarbhorn</b> – Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, first UN Independent Expert on Violence and Discrimination based on SOGI, Refugee Protection under International Law: Implications for LGBTI and beyond".
10.20 – 10.40	<b>Professor Nuno Ferreira and Dr. Moira Dustin</b> – SOGICA, University of Sussex, <i>LGBTIQ+ Asylum in Europe</i>
10.40 – 11.00	<b>Coffee and Tea</b>
11.00 – 11.20	<b>Bojana Asanovic</b> – UK Lesbian & Gay Immigration Group, <i>LGBTIQ+ Asylum in the United Kingdom: Developments over the Past Decade</i>
11.20 – 11.40	<b>Marlen Vahle</b> – Kölner Flüchtlingsrat, <i>LGBTIQ* Refugees' Experiences with the BAMF Asylum Interview</i>
11.40 – 13.00	<b>Podium Discussion</b> on Intersectionality: Dr. des Harpreet Cholia - Hessischer Flüchtlingsrat Dr. Mengia Tschalaer – Queer Muslim Asylum in Germany Lilith Raza – Queer Refugees Germany/LSVD Kadir Özdemir – Nvbf QLM – Queeres Leben in der Migrationsgesellschaft Edward Mutebi – Rainbow Refugees Munich Irene Bulungi – Black Lesbian Refugees and LeTRa <i>Moderator: Dr. Nina Held – SOGICA</i>
13.00 – 13.45	<b>Lunch</b>
13.45 – 14.00	Singing by <b>Mahdi</b>
14.00 – 15.30	<b>Moderated Theme Tables:</b> (1) "Traversing between invisibilities and sensibilities" (Harpreet Cholia and Sofian) (2) "Legal representation and appeals in court" (Knud Wechterstein) (3) "Support and Preparation before the Asylum Interview" (Marlen Vahle) (4) "The 'Special Vulnerability' of Queer Refugees: Political Challenges" (Mohammad Dalla) (5) "The Importance of Empowerment & Self Representations of LGBTIQ* Refugees" (Kadir Özdemir) (6) "Challenges for intersexual and transgender asylum claimants" (Christel Balthes-Loehr) (7) "Support needs for lesbian and bisexual women" (Julia Serdarov, Sara Schmitter and Elceta Marsha Ennis) (8) "Self-defence as an empowerment tool" (Heghine Babayan) (9) "Accommodation and social isolation" (Danijel Cubelic and Rzouga Selmi) (10) "Understandings of sexuality and gender in the Asylum Process" (Jana Borusko and Bojana Asanovic)
15.30 – 15.45	<b>Coffee and Tea</b>
15.45 – 17.00	<b>Podium Discussion</b> on Comparative Approaches: Bella Stevens – ORAM Dr. Amit-Elias Marcus – Aidshilfe Düsseldorf Elceta Marsha Ennis Dr. Carmelo Danisi – SOGICA Danijel Cubelic - Stadt Heidelberg Barry O'Leary – Wesley Gryk Solicitors LLP <i>Moderator: Anbid Zaman – SOGICA Advisory Board</i>
17.00 – 17.30	Dance Performance by <b>Prince Emrah</b>
17.20 - 17.30	<b>Closing</b>

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**Presentations and discussions**

**Prof Uta Ruppert** welcomed participants and explained her reasons for welcoming this collaboration with the *SOGICA* project, including a shared approach in terms of understandings of globalisation and global problems. The pressures, ambiguities and contradictions we face today have been sharpened by the context of the Italian Sea Watch tragedy. It may seem that this is a story about the far right in Italy criminalising people on the move but we all know that it is not just a problem in Italy.

The conference aims at bringing together not only queer refugees and asylum seekers with people from academia but also with NGO activists and policy makers, making this a special opportunity in terms of knowledge production, and also policy initiatives. Uta hoped that taking a comparative, queer and intersectional perspective would allow for learning from different kinds of practices, connecting them to broader contexts of political and social conditions.

She concluded by saying she appreciated not only the opportunity to host this conference but also the entire collaboration with Dr Nina Held, which is a pleasure and an honour.

**Dr Nina Held** thanked the Cornelia Goethe Centre at the Goethe University, Dr Ruppert and all the funders and conference supporters. She gave particular thanks to Julia from LeTRa who managed to bring a large group of refugee women from Bavaria. Nina explained that she was especially proud that, with one sad exception – a refugee woman who is staying at a reception centre in Bavaria and did not get a travel permit on time – we were able to get everyone here, who wanted to attend the conference (by paying for travel and offering accommodation).

There were further welcomes from the other event sponsors on behalf of their organisations: **Rainbow Refugees Frankfurt; LeTRa Munich, Koeln Cologne Refugee Council and Hessen Refugee Council**. Speakers stressed their wish to make this space and event as inclusive as possible.

**Harpreet Cholia** chaired the morning session, which began with a fantastic presentation by **Prof Vinit Muntarbhorn** who suggested we think in terms of pre-flow, flow and post-flow situations. He discussed language issues. From the UN perspective, the rubric used is SOGI (sexual orientation and gender orientation) and in terms of UN programming it is LGBT and increasingly LGBTI. If you look at law and policy on this front, the main entry point is the 1951 UN Convention as amended by the 1967 Protocol. But he drew attention to some of the other entry points we can use when thinking about protection: the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention against Torture. Picking up on the conference theme of intersectionality, Vinit pointed out that we are not only persecuted because we are gay, but because we are from Africa, a certain colour etc.

In conclusion, we want action that is more preventive, we want more protection of our rights, including no pushback, better access to justice, provision of solutions that are both temporary and durable. We want the toilet outside to start being gender neutral (clapping). Let us bless a world of gender diversity under international law.

**Prof Nuno Ferreira and Dr Moira Dustin** introduced the *SOGICA* project, a research project funded by the European Research Council (ERC) and addressing the social and legal experiences of SOGI asylum claimants – across Europe. It's a 4 year project (2016-2020) based at the University of Sussex in the UK. The project aims are to produce primary qualitative data and new analysis of SOGI-related asylum claims and improve understanding of how experiences and outcomes are affected by the different sexual orientation and gender identity grounds that are the basis of individual claims, as well as how gender, race, age, socio-economic status and religion intersect with SOGI and 'refugeeness'. We will be making recommendations covering law and social policy to contribute to developing fairer SOGI asylum processes and experiences in Europe. We're trying to make it more than an academic project, so as well as a monograph, peer reviewed articles and the recommendations, we're also carrying out broader knowledge exchange and engagement activities.

Some of the problems the project is finding relate to the lack of reliable statistics about SOGI claims, the need for better guidance and training, and the difficulty that claimants have in proving they are 'credible'. SOGI-specific accommodation is beginning to be provided in some countries but is increasingly seen as a need. In conclusion, the project is uncovering a high degree of variation, not

least in the contrast between internal SOGI legal frameworks and the framework applied to international protection claims.

Some of the points discussed after the morning session included:

- Problems with the use of interpreters that are less to do with policy than with implementation
- Differences in language and expression
- The hostile environment, lack of political will and stereotyping as the reason why many claims fail.
- The question of whether SOGI is distinct or a part of human rights law – which is the entry point for UN strategy
- There is no single official channel for informing EU processes – participants are advised to lobby MEPs
- Viti recommended the recently published Report of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity: [Data collection and management as a means to create heightened awareness of violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.](#)

In the next session, **Bojana Asanovic** began by apologising for UKLGIG's non-inclusive name (UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group). This dates back to the organisations origins – when it was founded and its purpose was bringing over same sex partners. Since 2002, the entire focus has been on supporting people through the asylum process in the UK. An important part of our work is also lobbying and holding the government to account. Bojana gave participants a bird's eye view of what is happening in the UK by talking about the three critical pieces of research the organisation has published over the past decade: *Failing the Grade* (2010), *Missing the Mark* (2013) and *Still Falling Short* (2018). Each of these has drawn attention to important problems in the UK asylum system for LGBTQI+ people.

**Marlen Vahle** presented findings of a survey that the Kölner Flüchtlingsrat and several other NGOs in Nordrhein-Westfalia carried out on refugee experiences with the BAMF interview and which Dr. Nina Held (SOGICA project) helped analysing. Some of the reasons people were not able to give SOGI as the grounds of their flight included their fears of family members, or translators. The survey highlighted the importance of having support in terms of explaining rights and preparing for the interview, which increases the chances of getting a positive decision.

Some of the points discussed after the second session included discussion of how to stop decision makers asking painful and intrusive questions about sexuality and the particular difficulties lesbian women and bi-sexual people face. Sometimes there are no words in someone's language to explain themselves. There needs to be a lot more discussion of what questions are and are not OK to ask.

### Podium-discussions

There were two podium discussions. One on *Intersectionality* and one on *Comparative Approaches*.

Participants in the podium discussion on *Intersectionality* were **Lilith Raza (Queer Refugees Germany/LSVD)**, **Dr. des Harpreet Cholia (Hessischer Flüchtlingsrat)**, **Dr. Mengia Tschalaer (Queer Muslim Asylum in Germany)**, **Dr. Nina Held (SOGICA)**, **Kadir Özdemir (Nvbf QLM – Queeres Leben in der Migrationsgesellschaft)**, **Edward Mutebi (Rainbow Refugees Munich)** and **Irene Bulungi (Black Lesbian Refugees and LeTRa)**.

Points discussed included:

- The experiences of lesbians who find it difficult to raise their voices and often do not have the confidence to do so.
- The importance of support from other organisations, e.g. the Munich organisation LeTRa
- The conundrum of an increasingly LGBTQI+ tolerant Europe alongside the increasing criminalisation of asylum seekers, including LGBTQI+ asylum seekers.
- Differences in experiences for example, the apparent higher rate of initial refusals to African lesbians than non-African lesbians. For black lesbians being racialised, their biographies often do not speak to assumptions on female victimhood which can go against their claims, especially if they have children, have been married but yet choose to pursue a gay/queer life in Germany.
- People whose stories do not align with Western assumptions of gay/queer lifestyle have difficulty.
- Gender based violence against lesbian women not recognised as relating to sexual orientation as basis of asylum claim.
- People are discriminated against in so many ways – because of colour, because of language, because of religion, because of education – education in particular, is a big problem for people going for BAMF interviews.
- Differences in treatment from one place to another, e.g. Frankfurt and Bavaria – there are no safe houses for LGBT people in Bavaria.
- People highlight different features of themselves at different times: one speaker talked about a woman refugee from Algeria who said her whole identity had been being a lesbian woman, then she came to Germany, and she said ‘I turned from a lesbian into an Arab’. The importance of setting our own agenda.
- Intersectionality may also mean having broader alliances.
- We need to challenge the binary breakdown between refugees and people who support refugees.
- Lesbian women are often disbelieved if they have had children or been married.
- There is a lack of country of origin information about lesbian women.
- Practical tips – take someone to court with you and if you can, make it a male, white German person (laughter) – indication the power differentials
- It was pointed out that Germany has signed and ratified the Istanbul Convention so women should try to make a case that their gender-based violence is because of their sexual orientation.

Participants in the podium discussion on *Comparative Approaches* were **Bella Stevens (ORAM)**, **Dr. Amit-Elias Marcus (Aidshilfe Düsseldorf)**, **Dr. Carmelo Danisi (SOGICA)**, **Elceta Marsha Ennis, Dr. Carmelo Danisi (SOGICA)**, **Danijel Cubelic (Stadt Heidelberg)**, **Barry O'Leary (Wesley Gryk Solicitors LLP)** and **Anbid Zaman (SOGICA Advisory Board)**.

Contributions included:

- Most people escape to neighbouring countries, which is hugely problematic for LGBTQI+ people because they often experience same homo/transphobia as in their country of origin.
- Other big challenge in transit countries is the length of time people are staying there – now 0.6% of people are resettled safely to a third country which means having to manage expectations.
- Another issue is housing – LGBTQI+ people in Turkey for example are not sent to more cosmopolitan areas like Istanbul but satellite areas which are more conservative.
- Employment is also a major issue. It is impossible to find in transit so most people find illegal work so people suffer exploitation, sexual abuse and violence in the workplace and have to resort to survival sex work.
- ORAM believes in more training – of police and professionals, more LGBTQI+ specific training, ask governments to rehouse LGBTQI+ asylum seekers to larger cities if possible.

- Aidshilfe Düsseldorf is a project for gay and bisexual refugees and migrants. There have been bad and good practices in the last year in Düsseldorf and Nordrhein-Westphalia. Quite a lot of people coming to the organisation who didn't say they were gay before their first decision or even in court and are now desperate.
- Also the move to deport people more quickly. In Düsseldorf there is now, after a lot of pressure, good relations.
- It is very difficult to find safe apartments for people in Düsseldorf – and that is to do with lack of accommodation but also prejudice. Then, even if people find accommodation, they feel isolated, they are alone there. Aidshilfe Düsseldorf's one weekly group meeting is helpful but not enough.
- Elceta from Jamaica is part of a support organisation for lesbians. She talked about her experiences as a lesbian refugee to bring more visibility, because lesbians of colour are still invisible.
- Barry talked about 'us' and 'them'. His work goes back 20 years, which is how long he has been representing people. This area used to be dominated by gay white male lawyers – it's getting better but his concern is that the SOGI refugees are still not in the room. It's still people like Barry doing the training. There are exceptions but the next step is for organisations in the UK to have refugees not just sharing their experiences but also involved in policymaking.
- Danijel talked from the perspective of the Heidelberg anti-discrimination and diversity programme. Problems sometimes start when asylum granted. One LGBTI+ refugee went to job centre with Danijel and was told he didn't need to have more language education and was offered a job in a donor kebab or falafel shop. We need to think about how to support LGBTQI+ refugees to build careers and a good life.
- Carmelo described how in Italy, at this moment, politics is about protecting sovereignty, borders. This 'hostile environment' is highly detrimental for people claiming asylum. To give you a striking example, last year there was a conference in Verona about protection of the traditional family and a Minister of Uganda, who was responsible for the latest anti-gay bill, was invited as a keynote speaker. Instead of disapproving the initiative, representatives of the Italian Government attended the event. This hostile environment has to be read to recent bad practices, including the 'closed harbour policy' and the persistence of stereotypes and cultural bias in questions to claimants in interviews, and their consequences in terms of widespread fears among claimants in connection to arrival, reception and integration. Carmelo provided some statements and quotations from his fieldwork in Italy as illustration.

In the open session that followed, there was discussion about challenges and possible solutions:

- One of the biggest issues is housing and making people feel safe and protected.
- Stigma is a problem. Safe houses are a relatively good solution for many. Nonetheless, they cannot be permanent solutions. Those who have difficulty finding jobs end up staying in this accommodation longer and it is more and more frustrating for them. They do not have privacy. There are tensions and conflict in living long-term with people you have not chosen to live with. The communities in Germany need to take responsibility for these problems. There must be a way to encourage people who rent out their accommodation to do so to asylum seekers.
- Germany has the chance to have so many smart intelligent creative young people coming to this country who are resilient and all we do is give them a basic language class and put them in a service job. And Germany is losing from this. Changing this would change how many Germans look at refugees.
- Detention was raised in discussion: in terms of UK, we used to have many people detained when they went to claim asylum. The UK Supreme Court found that unlawful. However the UK has unlimited detention unlike other countries in Europe.
- Italy does not have the same situation as UK but it does have camps. The time spent in these camps is not detention but its time spent not doing anything.

- In terms of solutions, UKLGIG take the approach of being critical but constructive and although the best changes tend to come from the judiciary, the British government have moved somewhat so this constructive-but-critical approach is working.
- In Germany there are at least three levels of influence – the federal republic where it is very difficult to have influence, the level of the state where one can have some influence, and also city level. Support often comes from the community, from the society itself.

### Moderated theme tables

In the afternoon, there were ten moderated theme tables on different topics, which people could choose. The idea was that people move around to another table after 30 mins of discussion, but many people stayed at one table for the whole duration to have more in-depth discussions.

#### 1. "Traversing between invisibilities and sensibilities" (Harpreet Cholia and Sofian)

This table focused on racism and options for self-organisation and what kind of services are required in counselling and advice services that need to cater for the needs of queer refugees when confronted with (systematic) violence.

#### Questions that were addressed:

- What do support organisations need to provide queer and trans-sensitive services?
- Racism and discrimination within the LGBTQI\*- community: what forms of solidarity are possible?

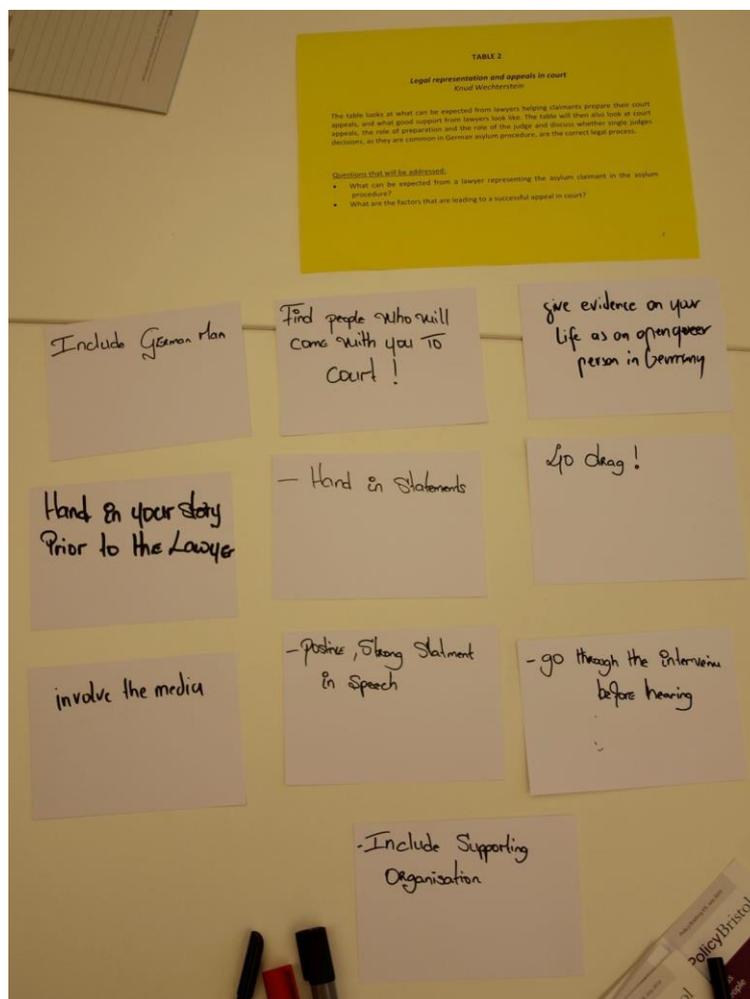


## 2. "Legal representation and appeals in court" (Knud Wechterstein)

The table looked at what can be expected from lawyers helping claimants prepare their court appeals, and what good support from lawyers looks like. The table also looked at court appeals, the role of preparation and the role of the judge and discussed whether single judges decisions, as they are common in German asylum procedure, are the correct legal process.

### Questions that were addressed:

- What can be expected from a lawyer representing the asylum claimant in the asylum procedure?
- What are the factors that are leading to a successful appeal in court?

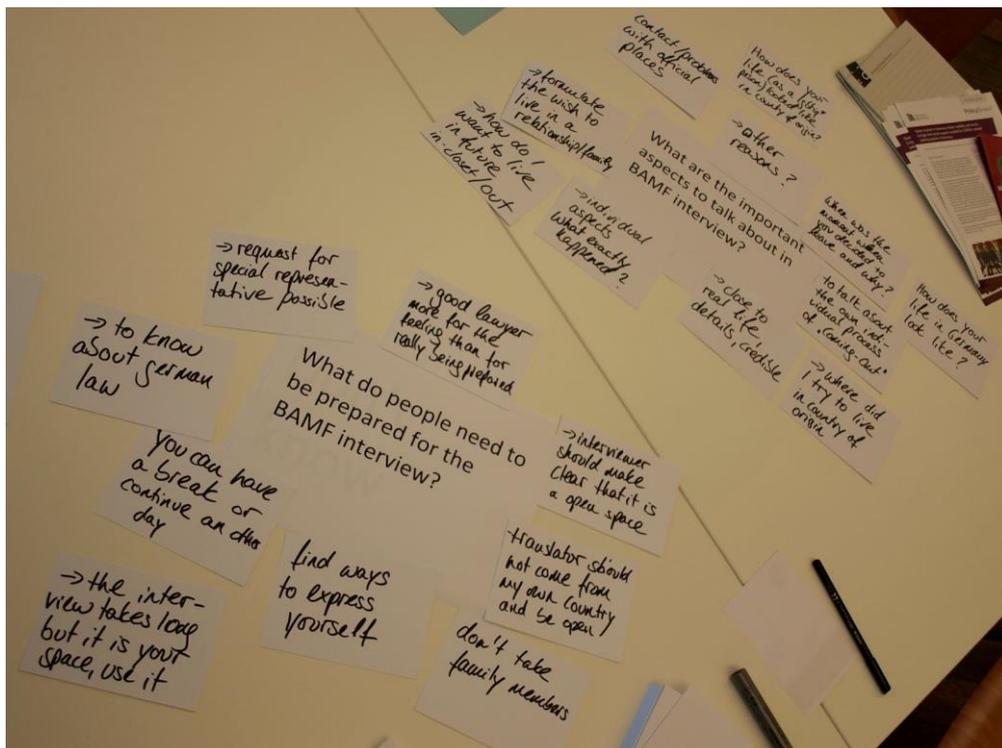


### 3. "Support and Preparation before the Asylum Interview" (Marlen Vahle)

At this table, we discussed what a good preparation for the asylum interview looks like and which aspects should be addressed during the interview. We also looked at questions that are asked in the asylum interview, and discussed whether we think that these are sensible questions to ask to find out about the claimant's sexual identity.

#### Questions that were addressed:

- What do people need to be prepared for the BAMF interview?
- What are the important aspects to talk about in BAMF interview?



### 4. "The 'Special Vulnerability' of Queer Refugees: Political Challenges" (Mohammad Dalla)

In August 2015, based on the EU Directive 2013/33/EU, the Berlin Senate included SOGI-claimants in the group of the 'most vulnerable' in their "Masterplan: Integration and Safety" and created "The Berlin Model for the Support of LGBTI Refugees". At this table, we discussed what we could we learn from the Berliner experience.

#### Questions that were addressed:

- How do we reach a comprehensive system of identification enabling a support that meets the needs of SOGI claimants?
- How do we reach a nationwide recognition of the "special vulnerability" of SOGI-claimants?

The participants assured the importance of the recognition of the special vulnerability of SOGI-claimants as an important step that offers a legal framework to deal with the problems facing them. However, the law is not everything; there is a need for an interdisciplinary implementation approach, which includes sufficient practical measurements and guidelines. This must be also supported by social pressure and public advocacy. On an organizational level, the participants believe that more support is required, not just counselling. And since this issue is political rather than executive, queer organizations and initiatives should focus on raising awareness, forming more alliances, and using the media to shed light on good examples and to report violations. Finally, structural barriers were also discussed, as the absence of representation of SOGI-claimants or people with SOGIC-flight experiences within the asylum decision-making procedure remains as a main obstacle of reaching a comprehensive asylum system that ensures the dignity of SOGIC-claimants and the protection of their human rights.

**The "Special Vulnerability" of Queer Refugees: Political Challenges**

**BUNDESSTIFTUNG  
MAGNUS  
HIRSCHFELD**

**Legal Frameworks of Asylum**

- **National Law** (the German Constitution, the Asylum Act of the Residence Act)
- **European Law** (Directive 2004/83/EC, Directive 013/33/EU)
- **International Law** (the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees)

**Article 10  
Reasons for persecution**

European Law: Directive 2004/83/EC

- A **particular social group** might include a group based on a common characteristic of sexual orientation
- Gender related aspects might be considered, without by themselves alone creating a presumption for the applicability of this Article
- In 2005, this Article was implemented into the German Residence Act, recognizing claims of persecution on grounds of gender identity and sexual orientation

**Article 21  
General Principle**

“Member States shall take into account the specific situation of vulnerable persons such as minors, unaccompanied minors, disabled people, elderly people, pregnant women, single parents with minor children, victims of human trafficking, persons with serious illnesses, persons with mental disorders and persons who have been subjected to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence, such as victims of female genital mutilation, in the national law implementing this Directive.”

**Article 18**

3. Member States shall take into consideration gender and age-specific concerns and the situation of vulnerable persons in relation to applicants within the premises and accommodation centers referred to in paragraph 1(a) and (b).

4. Member States shall take appropriate measures to prevent assault and gender-based violence, including sexual assault and harassment, within the premises and accommodation centres referred to in paragraph 1(a) and (b).

**AIDA Report Germany 2018**

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Asylum Information Database

- No requirement in law or mechanism in place to systematically identify vulnerable persons in the asylum procedure (with some exceptions)
- No legal obligation to provide separated facilities/ wings for vulnerable groups
- BAMF drafted a “concept for the identification of vulnerable groups” in 2015, but it was never implemented, and is only used as an internal guideline
- German Asylum Act, after amendment in 2016, still fails to properly transpose the Asylum Procedures Directive (2013/33/EU)
- The identification procedures in Germany are “a matter of **luck and coincidence**”

**The Concept of „Special Vulnerability“**

- Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament
- It aims to guarantee a dignified standard of living for asylum seekers in the EU and ensure their human rights are respected.
- It creates rules on living (or ‘reception’) conditions for applicants for international protection (asylum seekers or people seeking subsidiary protection)
- It applies from 19 July 2013. EU countries had to incorporate it into national law by 21 July 2015.

**Information Note on: Directive 2013/33/EU (July 2015)**

**ecre**  
European Council on Refugees and Exiles

- The list of vulnerable persons is **not exhaustive**
- Adopting **an inclusive approach** as regards the definition of applicants with special reception needs
- Transposition in national law should be complemented by **detailed guidance** (during the asylum process, and effective mechanisms for their identification)

**Group Work**

**challenge**

- “The Berlin Model for the Support of LGBTIQ Refugees” as an example of good practice
- How do we reach a nationwide recognition of “special vulnerability” of LGBTIQ\* refugees?
- How do we reach a comprehensive system of identification?

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**HEINRICH BÜLL STIFTUNG**

Project “Refugees & Queers”

The promoter of this poster acknowledges the financial support of the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation

**Universität  
Wuppertal**

## 5. “The Importance of Empowerment & Self Representations of LGBTIQ\* Refugees” (Kadir Özdemir)

At this table, we talked about the complex array of power and power sharing. We discussed about our experiences and expectations about empowerment of LGBTIQ\* refugees.

### Questions that were addressed:

- What are your experiences & expectations on empowerment & self-representations?
- What can we do to support and provide structures to empower LGBTIQ\* refugees and make self-representations possible?

A diverse group of people discussed experiences or wishes for support, empowerment and self-advocacy. The topic raised very important questions that unfortunately could not fully be explored

in the short space of time. The participants' views were varied. While some were politically active and wished for projects on their own, others were happy to just be able to join groups and organisations and get a room they could use once a month. Accordingly, the understanding of self-representation and visibility was very different. The isolation in rural areas was also an issue for us and the lack of money / projects to make it possible that refugees from the rural area of larger communities can participate in the offers of the municipalities.

Several refugee women spoke about their involvement in a self-organization, which they find very empowering. Their activities are mainly aimed at getting together, cooking together, organizing dances and celebrations. For them the problem was that, unfortunately, they were seldom able to see each other, so further projects will take a great deal of organisational effort. For example, they organized a theatre play, but the rehearsals were very challenging due to the lack of space and money for travel expenses. It was an emotional discussion with some members sharing some tears. It has become clear once again that a lot more empowering safe spaces are needed, but not just the spaces, but also the resources for it, so that they can be used effectively.

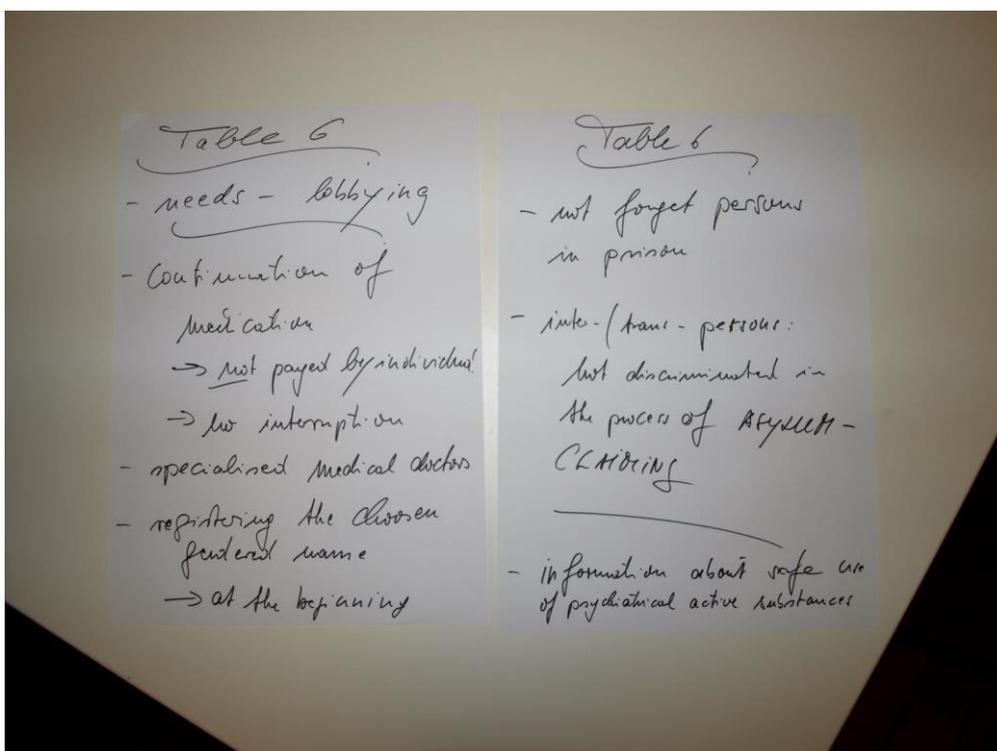


#### **6. “Challenges for intersexual and transgender asylum claimants” (Christel Baltes-Loehr)**

Related to age, cultural and ethnic belonging, religion, political standing, socioeconomic and educational status (intersectional perspective) and related to a huge variability in perspective of the interwovenness of the physical, psychical, behavioral and sexual desire dimension (figure of the continuum), each intersexual and transgender asylum claimant has an own “position” – assigned by the asylum claimant and/or assigned by others. Therefore, also the challenges for the asylum claimants can vary in a quite wide range as well as the needed support, arriving in a country as an asylum claimant.

### Questions that were addressed:

- How far can the specific needs, which intersexual and transgender asylum claimants have during their flight and arrival process, be answered by the supporters in NGOs, responsible authorities etc.?
- Which concrete measures are necessary on different levels and fields in policy, in education and training for the supporters and responsible authorities?



### **7. "Support needs for lesbian and bisexual women" (Julia Serdarov, Sara Schmitter and Elceta Marsha Ennis)**

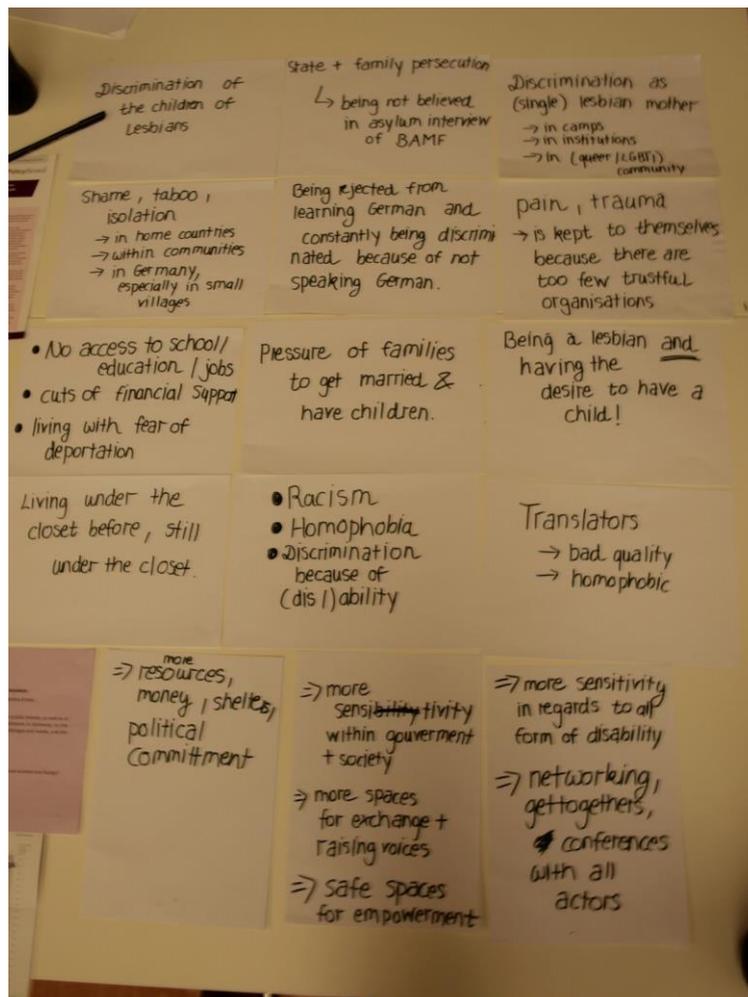
Bisexual and lesbian women claiming asylum are rather invisible, in public debate, as well as in support groups. However, there are many bisexual and lesbian claimants in Germany, as the experience of LeTRa, demonstrates. These women have specific challenges and needs, and the table aimed to make these more visible.

### Questions that were addressed:

- What are the specific needs and challenges that lesbian and bisexual women are facing?
- How can these issues be made more visible?

At this table, refugee women shared their experiences. It was quite an emotional session with many crying whilst telling their story or listening to others. The shared pain became visible. In terms of discussion, it has become clear once again that especially the topic of family / children matters a lot: in the country of origin, many are pressured by their families to marry and have children. In the

asylum procedure, being married is always a suspicion and that as lesbians they have children, gives room for their homosexuality to be questioned. In addition, their children (in the country of origin and in the accommodations here) experience a lot of marginalization because of the sexual orientation of their mothers. The isolation women (and their children) are being subjected to because of being housed in the rural has become clear once again ("living in the closet before and now").



## 8. "Self-defence as an empowerment tool" (Heghine Babayan)

Empowerment Self-Defence is a comprehensive and holistic method of violence resistance for groups vulnerable to violence. Empowerment Self-Defence uses verbal and mental skills for violence prevention and de-escalation, including assertive body language, boundary setting, and the making of informed choices to assess and possibly avoid violent situations. It also provides physical skills. During our meeting, we will practice the basics of Empowerment Self-Defence and share some of our experiences and knowledge in a safe space.

### **9. “Accommodation and social isolation” (Danijel Cubelic and Rzouga Selmi)**

After being transferred to a refugee accommodation, many LGBTIQ+ refugees experience discrimination or harassment. While refugees in general suffer from a lack of privacy, isolation and stress, LGBTIQ+ refugees are often the first victims of social tensions arising in refugee housing. As many accommodations are located in rural areas, many LGBTIQ+ refugees are disconnected from support organisations and possibilities to connect with their peers. The theme table discussed the importance of LGBTIQ+ refugees housing and safe spaces for LGBTIQ+ migrants.

#### Questions that were addressed:

- What is the importance of LGBTIQ+ refugee housing and safe spaces for LGBTIQ+ refugees?
- How can the social isolation that LGBTIQ+ refugees experience be tackled?

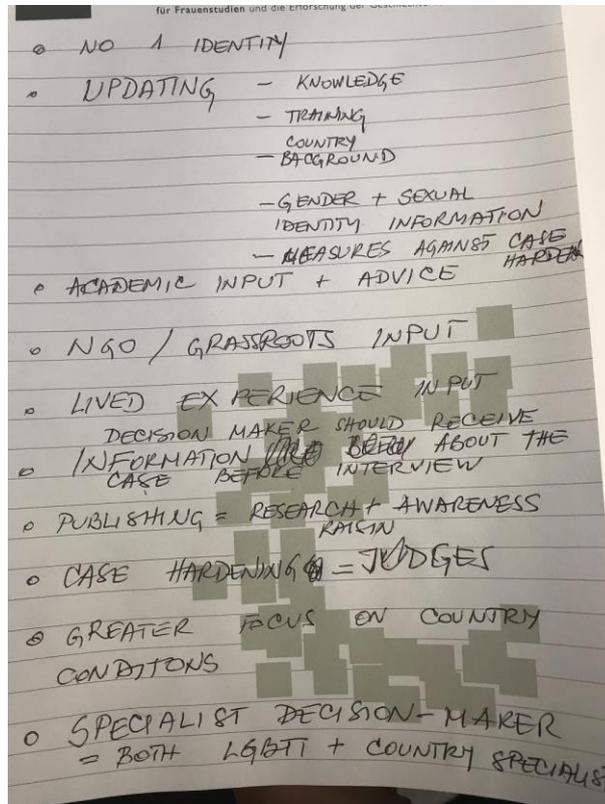


### **10. “Understandings of sexuality and gender in the Asylum Process” (Jana Borusko and Bojana Asanovic)**

People claiming asylum on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity must prove who they are. The lived experiences of non-dominant gender and sexual identities vary greatly, influenced by factors such as culture, religion, education and individual social background. Decision-makers have the unenviable task to assess claimants’ accounts looking for narratives they can believe. Experience from several countries shows that decision-makers often have fixed expectations as to how people should present and/or understand their experience. This table sought to explore the challenges presented by differences between lived experience of non-dominant identities and expectations of decision-makers.

Questions that were addressed:

- What do decision-makers look for and is it realistic?
- Countering stereotypes and introducing a “real life analysis”: What should be the best practice in credibility assessments?



Performances

We had two amazing performances. After lunch, **Mahdi** sang some beautiful songs, for which he got standing ovations. The conference ended with a magnificent dance performance by **Prince Emrah** and some dancing by all the conference participants.

