

# Not Alone in Europe

**Cooperation Strategy: Developing youth work  
practices on refugee inclusion**







# Not Alone in Europe

Marching for Equal rights and nothing more So come on folks, let's hear you roar! 5, 6, 7, 8 Stop the lies and  
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## INTRODUCTION

*Innovation Intellectual Output: 01* is a how-to guidebook focused on innovative youth work practices concerning LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex) asylum seekers, migrants, and refuge-seeking youth. This guide is based on the experiences, knowledge, and practices of the *Newcomers Youth* project, which targets young LGBTQI asylum seekers, undocumented people, and migrants in Sweden. *Newcomers Youth* is an ongoing project of the human rights organization *RFSL Youth* based in Stockholm, Sweden.

In order to make our youth work methodologies and guidelines graspable for both experienced and non-experienced actors working with young LGBTQI refugees, this guidebook is divided into four parts.

- The first part focuses on queer and asylum terminology that will be used throughout the material, and the provision of more information on *RFSL Youth* and *Newcomers Youth*. (4-7)
- The second part is focused on the ways of supporting LGBTQI young migrants, as well as reflecting on their needs and challenges. (8-12)
- The third part tackles advocacy work in relation to the target group's rights and strategic planning for the corresponding advocacy procedures. (14-17)
- Lastly, the fourth part of this book consists of recommendations, a summary and ideas for youth policies based on both theoretical knowledge and practical experience with the target group. (18)

# Part I.

## Asylum and LGBTQI: Glossary of Terms

*Please note that this glossary list is not comprehensive and all-including regarding asylum and queer-related terminology. Instead, it focuses primarily on the terms and phrases used throughout this material.*

**Appeal** | Means that a person writes to an authority or a court to say that they do not agree with the decision made by that authority or court, and they want the authority or court to change the decision.

**Asylum** | The grant of protection from one state (e.g., Sweden) to a person coming from another state (e.g., Afghanistan) due to persecution that the person has suffered on the grounds of some factors. In the context of our target group, the main factor is their *sexual orientation and/or gender identity*.

**The asylum process** | Refers to the different stages that an asylum seeker goes through from the application to the final decision/refusal that a person receives from the Migration Agency.

**Asylum seeker** | A person seeking protection from one state due to persecution that this person experienced in another state. Our target group consists of asylum seekers who are LGBTQI.

**Decision in an asylum case** | is when the personnel at the Migration Agency have made a decision on whether an asylum seeker can remain in the country or not.

**Judgment in an asylum case** | Is when the appeal has been reviewed and the court of appeal decides whether an asylum seeker is permitted to remain in the country or not.

**Refusal of asylum application** | Means that a person has received the answer “no” to their application for asylum. This person is not permitted to remain in the country of refuge.

**Residence permit** | Means that a person has received the answer “yes” to their application for asylum. This person is permitted to remain in the country of refuge.

**Undocumented person** | A person who does not have a legal right to reside in a country in which they are living. In the context of our target group, it is a person who did not get the grant of protection (asylum) from one country (e.g., Sweden). Regardless of that, this person decided to stay in that country (e.g., Sweden). Consequently, this person changed their status from asylum seeker to undocumented person due to not getting that country’s protection.

**Refugee** | A person who got the grant of protection (asylum) from one country due to persecution that person has suffered on the grounds of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social or ethnic group in another country. In the context of our target group, their refugee status is mainly on the grounds of them belonging to a particular social group (e.g., being a transgender person or lesbian woman).

**Migrant** | A person who moves from one country to another due to various reasons. In the context of our target group, leaving one country happens due to insufficient/lack of protection and violation of human rights that LGBTQI migrants have experienced.

**PTSD** | An abbreviation for post-traumatic stress disorder that falls within a frame of anxiety disorders. This condition is caused by a series (or one) of stressful and terrifying events that a person has experienced. Unfortunately, this condition is common among queer refugees who have been exposed to different sorts of violence, abuse and traumatic events.

**Trauma** | In this context, trauma always refers to psychological trauma, which represents an event(s) that was stressful and distressing. The consequences of a trauma include anxiety, fear, dissociation, and depression among others.

**Lesbian** | A homosexual woman.

**Gay** | A homosexual man in general terms, but often used by homosexual women in terms of their sexual orientation.

**Transgender** | If a person's gender identity is not the same as the sex assigned at their birth, that generally means that the person is transgender. If a person with a female gender identity is assigned as male at her birth, that person is a trans woman. If a person with a male gender identity is assigned as female at his birth, that person is a trans man.

**Intersex** | A person born with characteristics (i.e., chromosomes, sexual anatomy or reproductive organs) that do not belong within the medical definition of male or female.

**Queer** | A person who is not heterosexual OR not cisgender. In the context of our target group, queer migrants include those whose sexual orientation or gender identity is not heterosexual or cisgender. They migrated due to violations they experienced in relation to their queer identity (identities).

**Sexual orientation** | A person's sexual/romantic attraction to another person. The person's sexual orientation can be:

***Heterosexual*** - being sexually/romantically attracted to persons of different genders than you (e.g., a woman attracted to men).

***Homosexual*** - being sexually/romantically attracted to persons who have the same gender as you (e.g., a woman attracted to women).

***Bisexual*** - being sexually/romantically attracted to multiple genders (e.g., a woman being attracted to women and men).

***Pansexual*** - being sexually/romantically attracted to persons belonging to all genders.

***Asexual*** - not being or very little sexually attracted to other persons.

**Gender identity** | A personal perception of oneself as male, female or non-binary.

**Non-binary** | Gender identity (person's perception of themselves) that is neither male nor female - it is a gender identity that is outside of men/women binarity.

**Gender dysphoria** | A medical condition of distress that transgender person feels due to conflict between their gender identity and assigned sex at birth.

**Pronoun** | A type of word used when referring to someone directly (e.g., you) or indirectly (e.g., he, she, or they). Pronouns are always dependent on the language that we are using (the given examples are coming from the English language).

Using the right pronouns is especially important in relation to respect of persons' gender identities. A phenomenon that, for example, transgender persons often encounter is misgendering: using a wrong pronoun when we refer to a particular person e.g., (referring to a transgender woman with "he" although that is not her pronoun).

**Homophobia** | Negative attitudes, actions and discrimination against homosexual men and women (gay persons). In the context of our target group, homophobic incidences and respective states' lack of protection from those are the main reasons why gay asylum seekers ask for protection from another state (e.g., Sweden).

**Biphobia** | Negative attitudes, actions, and discrimination against bisexual persons. In the context of our target group, biphobic incidences and lack of protection are the main reasons why bisexual asylum seekers ask for protection from another state (e.g., Sweden).

**Transphobia** | Negative attitudes, actions, and discrimination against transgender persons. In the context of our target group, transphobic incidences and respective states' lack of protection from those are the main reasons why transgender asylum seekers ask for protection from another state (e.g., Sweden).

**Queerphobia** | Negative attitudes, actions, and discrimination against queer persons. In the context of our target group, queerphobic incidences and respective states' lack of protection from those are the main reasons why queer asylum seekers ask for protection from another state (e.g., Sweden).

**Heteronormativity** | The privileges of heterosexual persons which create a norm in overall society.

**Cisnormativity** | The privileges of cisgender persons which create a norm in overall society.

**Cisgender** | If a person's gender identity is the same as the sex assigned at their birth, it means that the person is cisgender.

**Coming out** | A process of accepting your sexual orientation/gender identity and sharing it openly with others.

**Intersectionality** | An analytical perspective that focuses on how identity categories (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality) overlap and create the power structures of superiority, subordination, discrimination and oppression.

**Minority Stress** | Stress imposed on minorities (e.g., sexual, gender, racial, among others) due to discrimination and prejudices they face by the majority group in one society (i.e., white, heterosexual, and cisgender majority).

## RFSL Youth and Newcomers Youth

### *RFSL Youth*

*RFSL Youth* works with providing a meeting place for LGBTQI young persons, political influence, human rights-related projects, HIV/STI prevention, education, and networking. The districts and activist groups of *RFSL Youth* are based in several regions and cities in Sweden, such as Dalarna, Luleå, Skåne, Stockholm, Sydvest, Karlstad, Gävle, Västerås Uppsala and Kiruna. Both districts and activist groups of *RFSL Youth* facilitate the activities at a local level based on members' needs and wishes. The organization's Executive Board and National Office are responsible for activities at the national and international levels.

#### *Meeting place*

A vision of *RFSL Youth's* meeting places includes the creation of safe and confidential hubs outside of cisgender norms and heteronormativity. *RFSL Youth's* districts facilitate different sorts of group meetings that can range from movie nights to camps. Every autumn, there is a national meeting where *RFSL Youth's* members from all over Sweden can meet and learn more about LGBTQI-related topics.

#### *Political influence*

*RFSL Youth* advocates against discrimination and works on strengthening the rights of young LGBTQI people not just in Sweden but also around the world. *RFSL Youth's* districts organize demonstrations and write different sorts of petitions, while *RFSL Youth's* Executive Board and National Office take part in writing suggestions to those in power and contribute to various debates around LGBTQI rights, feminism and anti-racist framework.

#### *Projects*

*RFSL Youth* works with projects that include developing new working methods for young LGBTQI people. Some of the projects offer support and counseling to various target groups who have found themselves in a challenging situation. *Newcomers Youth* is one of *RFSL Youth's* projects that work specifically with young queer persons with migrant experience.



## *HIV/STI prevention*

Many young LGBTQI people in Sweden do not feel that sex education in their schools provides them with the necessary information. Usually, a lot of focus is on reproduction instead of talking about what sex is for different persons. *RFSL Youth* informs young people about relationships, reciprocity and safer sex in an inclusive and norm-critical way.

## *Education*

*RFSL Youth* holds lectures and workshops about norm criticism, power structures, and LGBTQI topics specifically related to children and youth. The lectures and workshops are often done for *RFSL Youth*'s members, but also for professionals who meet young LGBTQI persons through their work. *RFSL Youth* also produces information and method materials.

## *Networking*

Much of *RFSL Youth*'s work is done in collaboration with organizations that work for the rights of children and young LGBTQI persons. *RFSL Youth* collaborates with *RFSL*, *Transammans* and *Save the Children's Youth Sweden*. *RFSL Youth* is a member of *IGLYO*, *ILGA-Europe* and *TGEU*.

## *Newcomers Youth*

*Newcomers Youth* is a project of *RFSL Youth* which target group is even more specific than the organization's one: not that our members are LGBTQI young persons (15-30 years of age), but they are also asylum seekers, undocumented persons, or newly arrived in Sweden.

*Newcomers Youth*'s primary focus is the physical and mental wellbeing of our members. We work on its betterment via the provision of a meeting place that includes various activities, as well as the provision of resources and services such as counseling. The specific activities of our project are weekly *Meeting Place*, weekly *Activist Workshop*, *Performance Workshop*, *Peer-to-Peer support Group*, annual *Activist Summer Camp*, *mental health counseling* and *legal counseling*. Since the second chapter of this guidebook focuses on supporting queer migrant youth, these will be explained in more detail.

The project's advocacy work includes spreading knowledge about challenges that queer young refugees experience in Sweden. Our debates, reports and public statements are often directed to politicians in Sweden, governmental institutions/actors, the queer community and the general public (chapter 3). It is noteworthy that most employees/volunteers within *Newcomers Youth* are LGBTQI young persons with asylum/migrant experience.

It is crucial for our project to provide the members directly with tools and mechanisms for improving their wellbeing. We choose to see them/us as the empowered actors, current/future activists and young individuals who aim to be less socially and legally vulnerable by having the correct information and access to the needed services. With this statement, we are not trying to undermine their/our challenges and vulnerability but to take ourselves out of victimization discourse where queer young refugees are seen as passive, less able and weight on Swedish society.

The *Newcomers Youth* project is funded by the *Swedish Inheritance Fund*, the *Social Welfare Board of Stockholm City* and the *County Administrative Board of Västra Götaland*.

## Part II.

# Presentation on Newcomers Youth's practices of supporting young LGBTQI migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers

The history of *Newcomers Youth* started with the provision of a meeting place for young asylum-seeking and newly arrived LGBTQI persons in Sweden. The very fact of providing a safe space where they feel secure was more than appreciated by the first members of our group. For many of them it was the first separatist place where they had a safe refuge together with our team, who shared the important identity categories with them - being an LGBTQI person and a person with migrant/asylum experience. However, there were not so many of us present there, and we strongly felt that many more youth could benefit from this setting.

Reaching a target group such as ours had not been an easy process, and it included various preparatory mechanisms. What we did and what we highly recommend you is to get in touch with different state and non-state actors, organizations and associations that already work with queer asylum-seeking youth. Inform them about what your particular team can offer to the target group, and bear in mind that collaboration with similar organizations brings visibility that is necessary for the members to reach out. There is no one way of reaching out to the group. It often includes a combination of different methods in addition to collaboration with other actors who work with asylum and queer rights: visibility through social media, encouragement of members to spread the word about your activities and bring their friends, producing information material that is youth-friendly and contain all crucial information for someone who is an LGBTQI asylum seeker in your local community.

Considering the fact that most of our members came from unsafe environments and traumatic settings, it was imperative to specify what the "safety" of our meeting place refers to? Understanding our members' group, responding to their needs in a good way and finding a solution to their challenges is a complex and ongoing process. Both basic, social and psychological needs of every individual are very different regardless that we have been sharing their queer and migrant identity experiences. A level of isolation, mental health challenges and insecurity differ from one queer asylum-seeking youth to another.

Respecting each other and making everyone feel welcome was our basic guideline before developing any concrete method and activity plan that came later on. This was a process where our first draft of the main working principles was developed in consultation with our members. To this day, every meeting starts with the repetition of four basic principles of the *Newcomers Youth*: safety, confidentiality, group care and self-care. A safety principle includes both a safe physical location and a space where young people can be themselves and be accepted for who they are. Confidentiality entails that all information shared within the meeting place, including who is attending our meetings, is kept between the participants and the *Newcomers Youth* team. This is particularly important since many of our members are not publicly out as queer persons, and we want their process of coming out to be something that they navigate and decide about. Group care refers to respect for every member. We have zero tolerance towards any mode of discrimination, violence and harassment. Lastly, the self-care principle means that these young people have an opportunity to express their needs and feelings, be it to leave the meeting place when they wish and when they need to be alone or to simply point out if something doesn't feel right within the meetings' setting.

*Important: If you would like to learn in more detail what it means in practice to create a safe meeting place for young LGBTQI migrants and asylum seekers, we remarkably recommend our step-by-step guidebook *YOUTH LGBTQ + Asylum: A guide for Newcomers Youth meeting places* available in both English and Swedish.*

*This guidebook also includes examples of confidentiality policy that can be used for both team and target group members, agreements given to youth workers working with the target group and the crisis management plan.*

As time passed, the members started to open up more, talk about their feelings and support each other in a confidential and family-like manner. Together with them, we were able to identify and explore all upcoming methods and tools aimed at their betterment on both individual and group levels. This has been a process of strengthening their identity and increasing knowledge about queer and asylum rights among the target group. At the same time it has been a learning process for us as the *Newcomers Youth* team: it was a learning process about the importance of intersectional perspective and considering each member as an expert on their needs and challenges.



It seems that only after establishing the safety principles for our meetings, we get a clear path for exploring different intersectional practices and together developing the methods that include informal learning and provision of relevant information for our target group. Consequently, our first mechanism for making our group less vulnerable was a process of capacity building. We have achieved that by setting up both legal and mental health counseling within the *Newcomers Youth* and collaborating with other professionals working within *RFSL Youth*. These are generally the first "needs" that our members have, and it often comes before their need for socialization or planning various activist endeavors with the ambition of making this world a better place.

## ***Individual capacity building: The Newcomers Youth's legal counseling and mental health counseling***

In addition to being queer and young, our members are newcomers in a foreign country such as Sweden is. Usually, they are not aware and fully informed upon their arrival how both the legal and administrative system works in Sweden: what are their rights, how the asylum process goes, to whom to turn in case they need help or assistance. The *Newcomers Youth's* volunteer lawyers and our migration policy expert have developed legal counseling as one of the services within our project. The newly arrived members can ask questions about their asylum application and get advice concerning their upcoming interviews with the *Swedish Migration Agency*. We are also happy to provide them with the membership certificates where their case officers can see that they are members of the *Newcomers Youth*, thus that they have started their integrative process in the queer community here. It is noteworthy that many of our members are asking for legal advice from our team not only when they are in the asylum process but also when they are planning to apply for asylum or to reenter the asylum process again.

The second central aspect of individual capacity building for our members is mental health counseling. In addition to the need for immediate legal assistance with their asylum cases, in the beginning many members ask how to deal with their anxiety, sometimes even depression and the effects of trauma. In collaboration with the *Pegasus* project within *RFSL Youth*, the *Newcomers Youth's* members have had a chance to book the sessions with our advisors, who are specialized in offering support concerning mental health. Sometimes our members just need someone willing to listen and give them concrete guidelines in relation to dealing with everything that the past, present and uncertain future bring. In addition to mentioned anxiety, depression and traumatic experiences, the members often reflect on their experiences of violence and abuse. Thus, those individual sessions with the advisors do not have a form of therapy. They are considered as a first aid - a space where someone is listening and where further help can be offered in terms of providing information about available psychological and medical services for asylum-seeking, undocumented and newly arrived youth in Sweden.

## ***Group capacity building via non-formal education: The Newcomers Youth's Peer-to-Peer Support Group, Activist Workshops, Activist Summer Camp, Performance Workshops and Meeting Place***

After the first stage of providing individual capacity-building-related services to individual members, we have learned that an interactive approach and more involvement at a social level is what our members aim for. The elements of non-formal education and group capacity building are achieved through the following settings within the *Newcomers Youth: Peer-to-Peer Support Group, Activist Workshop, Activist Summer Camp and Meeting Place*. In their own manner, each of these activities responds to the members' needs for separatist meeting places, queer empowerment, intercultural dialogue and social inclusion.

*Peer-to-Peer Support Group* is a group activity that focuses on mental health and dealing with stress. This is a separatist meeting place for members without the experts (legal and mental health advisors). They use their own knowledge and capacities to reflect on issues that commonly affect them as queer, asylum-seeking and young persons. As we often say on every *Peer-to-Peer* session, each of them is an expert on their own life, which is, of course, the basis of every *Peer-to-Peer* methodology. An element of non-formal education is implemented by having a group leader who shares the identity categories with the group, has completed a training course on *peer-to-peer* methodology and has knowledge on queer and wellbeing-related subjects. The *Peer-to-Peer Session Group* started by taking the suggestions from the members on the topics they would like to cover. The *Newcomers Youth* team has put their reflections in specific themes, and so far, we have been able to cover twelve sessions in the following order:

1. *Identity, Home and Security*
2. *Homo/bi/trans-phobia*
3. *Xenophobia & Racism*
4. *Community and Chosen Family*
5. *Faith & Religion*
6. *Relationships & Dating*
7. *Sex & Consent*
8. *To be an Adult*
9. *Minority Stress and Microaggressions*
10. *Coping with Trauma and Depression*
11. *Gender Expression*
12. *Body Image*

Note that we do the *Peer-to-Peer Support Group* activities stated above at a yearly level in combination with other group activities. That means that they are covered on a "one theme-one time-one month" basis. Depending on the dynamics of a particular group, they can be covered one after another as well (e.g., having a *Homo/bi/trans-phobia* session a week after *Identity, Home and Security* without "interrupting" it with *Activist Workshops*).

*Activist Workshop* is a tool that helps us empower our members to be a factor of change, take space and act in relation to the cases they care about. In contrast to *Peer-to-Peer* activities, which focus on mental health, *Activist Workshop* activities provide information on queer activism, community organizing and social change. Through non-formal education facilitated by our group leaders and coordinator, we offer the members both theoretical knowledge on LGBTQI topics, as well as practical skills on "how to be" an activist and the ways of leading and participating in activist endeavors. Once again, the members chose the topics. We have done it at a "one topic-one month" level in combination with mentioned *Peer-to-Peer Support Group* activities. Some of the topics we have covered are demonstrations, activism through photography, storytelling, digital campaigns. As you can see, all of these topics are various methods of activism that are not just explained theoretically by the *Newcomers Youth* team but also implemented practically in a final stage of covering a particular monthly *Activist Workshop*-related topic. According to our experience, activism, in general, is very embraced by our members in a period when they want to make a change both for themselves and their community. *The Activist Workshop* activities have proven to channel not just their enthusiasm but also their anger and frustration in a healthy-like manner.

As mentioned at the beginning of this guidebook, our activities are implemented locally in different cities in Sweden. Once per year, there is a group activity that involves the *Newcomers Youth's* members from different parts of the country gathering for *Activist Summer Camp*. In addition to spending time together in creative and casual activities, they have an opportunity to attend the workshops and lectures conducted by human rights activists and our national team of coordinators and group leaders. This is a space for planning and summing up everything we have learned throughout our local activities. Lastly, intercultural relations are something that we nurture in our work, and we aim to respect and cherish everyone's culture and tradition. In a period of five days that *Activist Summer Camp* takes place, we use an opportunity to have thematic dinners involving food from different parts of the world where our members come from, as well as organise evening hangouts with music popular in our home countries.

Once the setting is established in terms of individual capacity building (legal support and mental health counseling) and group activities aimed at the group's wellbeing (*Peer-to-Peer Support Group*) and activism (*Activist Workshop*), our members have expressed a need for more art-related and creative activities. We have responded to this particular request in terms of our activity named *Performance Workshop*. It represents a set of workshops that focus on practicing and obtaining theatre and performance-related skills. Since our members are very enthusiastic about queer activism, these practices have often included improvisations that had the activist elements, as well as raising awareness about LGBTQI and refugee rights. These workshops have become tools for healing and a platform for telling their personal stories in words through dance, music and art.

Consequently, the *Newcomers Youth* team and members have decided to start preparing a theatre show named *If We Had the Power*, where our members' personal stories are told via performance. Our method of working with art and activism is what we call *Creative Change* based on four principles: group dynamics, learning-by-doing, feedback & dialogue, and reflection. The *Performance Workshops* are run weekly, and they are run by our group leaders, as well as guest artists who visit our workshops after signing all necessary agreements related to confidentiality and respect of safety principles at the *Newcomers Youth's* meetings.



Lastly, our group activity happening regularly and weekly is *Meeting Place*. This setting is the most casual one of all mentioned before. It is a safe space where the members can enjoy leisure activities. It is conceptualized as a weekly hangout where the members meet each other, play games, watch movies or do whatever they feel like doing on a particular occasion. This setting adds up to our goal of providing them with inclusion and empowerment since they are the ones who decide from what sort of food they would like to have for Meeting Place to what kind of activity they would like to engage in. Of course, the casual vibe of the Meeting Place never takes over our safety principles related to safety, confidentiality, group care and self-care.

## ***Elements of innovation based on emerging needs: Transgender Consultancy, Online Hangouts and Newcomers Youth Magazine***

Since we started with our work, the *Newcomers Youth* team has been learning by doing, and our close work with the target group sets light on dynamics that we have not been thinking about initially. Additionally, we believe that the mentioned and to-be-mentioned activities have a strong potential of transferability applicable not just in other cities in Sweden but also in other queer asylum seekers hosting countries. However, there is a disclaimer right after this confident-sounding sentence:

*One should bear in mind that there is a complexity of factors that influence what is transferable in your setting: the dynamics of your particular group, the dynamics of your team (to what extent they share identity categories with the group and where their professional/activist competence lay), the contextual dynamics (how the projects are granted and facilitated in your residence country). These dynamics are not the same even in the same city, not to mention different countries with different resources and opportunities. Consequently, we cannot promise you what will work and what will not work in your context. What we can promise is that we aim to inspire you and encourage you to adapt both our and your existing methods to the needs and challenges of your particular group.*

A detected need for *Transgender Consultancy* was realized itself as an activity at the beginning of 2020. Since many of our activities (e.g., *Activist Workshop*, *Peer-to-Peer Support Group*) have been covering the topics of gender identity and gender expression, many reflections have come from our members. Once the activities end, the members often request one-on-one meetings with the group leaders/coordinators. These meetings usually included our conversations on the topics belonging to a domain of "transgender". The queer asylum-seeking youth often come from settings where there is no word for one's non-normative gender identity/gender expression. What we (the European-based youth workers) know as transgender/non-binary is very much influenced by the Western and Eurocentric normativity of describing someone who does not belong in a cisgender frame. Consequently, we also have had to rethink whether there are other wordings (or no wordings at all) in members' minds when explaining their gender-related experiences.

The *Transgender Consultancy* is currently having a form of one-on-one support sessions within the *Newcomers Youth*. Since this is a very sensitive area where the members' decision to start with hormone replacement therapy, for example, is something that seriously affects one's future, these sessions have to be conducted with great care, as well as with relevant knowledge from the consultant's side. As we mention throughout the guidebook, the members always decide which direction they want to go in their lives. The group leaders, coordinators, and youth workers are here to provide them with the correct information and space to explore their identities and expressions. Consequently, our *Transgender Consultancy* includes the provision of information about transgender rights, transgender healthcare in Sweden, as well as support that they get in their local communities. They are conducted by our coordinator, who has both transgender and migrant experience. In terms of her education, she is a sociologist specialized in gender studies which makes her eligible to provide trans-related information to transgender and non-binary asylum-seeking youth, as well as those who simply want to know more about trans-related topics.

The second activity that we would like to highlight here represents our adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic situation in Sweden. The recommendations from *The Public Health Agency of Sweden* clearly stated the limited number of participants for the physical meeting; this was not a viable option for the *Newcomers Youth* since it would leave many of our members "outside" - if the recommendation states that the meeting could have only five persons in total, that usually means that more than twenty of our members who need support and meeting-setting will not get it. As queer migrant youth, our members are isolated in one way. The pandemic situation brought another level of isolation as well.

To prevent prioritizing some members in relation to others (having a limited number of participants in the Swedish cities that we operate in) and make sure the members are safe health-wise, we developed a context of Online Hangouts. They were realized as online video meetings where we connected all *Newcomers Youth* members residing in different places in Sweden. According to members' reflections, this new context was not something less funny than a regular *Meeting Place*, but an

exciting setting where they could meet their fellow newcomers every week. Up to this point, the *Activist Summer Camp* was the only opportunity when they could see each other, and they often kept in touch long after the summer activity. From this point, they could meet their community more often, learn more about one another and develop strong friendships. Of course, the group leaders were always present, and the group was reminded about safety and confidentiality-related principles that we transferred to the online setting. When it comes to topics, they range from sexuality, gender identity and mental health to simple hangouts and fun activities. The themes are always chosen together with the members depending on what they want to prioritize in a particular time and context.

Finally, the third activity realized after getting to know our members better is responding to their need to express themselves through creative writing. Although the *Performance Workshop* can give space to those who enjoy the performance as an art form, many members solely consider writing as a part of their healing process. During the reflection meetings they often chose a written format for conveying their personal narratives. During the *Performance Workshop* we saw a writing potential in many who would write small scripts applicable to the stage; this was when an idea for *Newcomers Youth Magazine* was born, and the members were invited to give their written contributions. They were writing the articles related not just to their personal stories but LGBTQI issues overall, as well as asylum and migration. Each of them got one advisor from our team who helped them contextualize their thoughts, follow the established standards for magazines' articles and encourage them to bring their authentic selves in their written pieces. The first edition of the *Newcomers Youth Magazine* is about to be published. We expect its release in the following months.

The facilitation of all mentioned activities of the *Newcomers Youth* requires regular and consistent communication with our members. Once again, there is no one way of doing so. Our team has been using a combination of different strategies: sending weekly emails, sending weekly SMS reminders, making individual telephone calls, posting information about upcoming activities on our website and social media. Make sure to always remind the members that they are welcome to call and ask any questions related to the meeting activities or anything that concerns them. Be approachable as a team, respectful to different needs that different members might have, and remember that what works for one individual will not necessarily work in the case of another youth.





## Part III.

# A how-to-guide on advocacy at a local, national and international level and strategic partnerships

In this chapter, we will share a how-to guide on how to create your own advocacy agenda. By sharing how *Newcomers Youth* went from a service providing project to advocating for the rights of LGBTQI youth with asylum experience, we hope to provide you with our most important insights, experiences, some best practices, and hopefully some inspiration of what you can do to create a better future for this target group.

### ***Step 1: KNOW IT***

#### ◆ *The situation of the target group*

Not Alone in Europe as a project is founded on the documented experiences of the Swedish national project *Newcomers Youth* and shares the same target group. *Newcomers Youth* started in 2016 with the concept of providing social meeting places and legal support to LGBTQI - youth with asylum experience in Sweden. After working with this target group for three years, it became apparent that the difficulties that the target group experienced, like mental illness, could be explained to a large extent by their legal status in Sweden. Many of the participants were still in the process of getting their asylum application expedited or had already gotten a rejection and were now living as undocumented in the country due to not being believed to be LGBTQI - persons by the *Swedish Migration Agency*. The target group's needs were closely linked to how they were treated in the legal system. To develop the activities of *Newcomers Youth* and to focus on the source of the difficulties the target group faced, it was decided to focus more on activism and advocacy - with and for the target group. Unlike many other larger organizations performing advocacy work, *RFSL Youth* had the benefit of being a youth-led organization in direct contact with the target group, as they are members of the organization and even members of the board. Not only creating a legitimate position around the table but also a unique voice.

#### ◆ *Collection of sources*

As for the collection of sources, we recommend the *SOGICA* database. '*SOGICA – Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Claims of Asylum: A European human rights challenge*' was a project funded by the *European Research Council*. It set out to produce the necessary evidence base for a more just and humane asylum process for individuals seeking refuge in Europe on the basis of their SOGI. <https://www.sogica.org/en/sogica-database/>

#### ◆ *Common themes*

There are certain common themes within the existing research. A good summary of the common themes and needed actions regarding LGBTQI refugees and asylum seekers is to be found in the recommendations from the *SOGICA* project. <https://www.sogica.org/en/final-recommendations/>

### ***Step 2: PLAN IT***

#### ◆ *Our approach to advocacy work*

The target group has unique knowledge and lived experience of the situation and the possible needs of the target group that they belong to. The general idea of conducting advocacy work is to create a platform for the target group to be heard and taken seriously. Our experience is that inclusion of target groups in political forums, international conferences and consultation rounds sometimes can be for the sake of ticking boxes. It is important to create a platform that serves both for the target group and the stakeholders to whom the advocacy work is directed.



### ◆ *Who is speaking?*

The source of information or recommendations is being clarified in each stage of the process. It even relates to such cases when the communication part is managed by personnel who do not belong to that specific target group. Though the goal is to strive for a complete representation of the target group, it is not always possible. However, the methodology itself promotes identification of those obstacles (e.g., loss of income, willingness to be anonymous, discomfort in public speaking) and ways to eliminate them. Please, note that inviting someone to the table does not still promote inclusion.

### ◆ *Where to go?*

In *Newcomers Youth*, we made an inventory of all the important national forums where civil society met the relevant stakeholders. This inventory must be made in accordance with the particular country where the advocacy work is taking place. Organize meetings with potential stakeholders and inform them about the unique insight that you have in the target group, meanwhile emphasizing that there are only a few organizations which directly work with that group. Step in, take your seat at the table and have your say!

### ◆ *Gathering experiences*

The idea of the inclusion of a particular target group is to fulfill the specific needs of that specific group. After a while, you will see that the gathered experience and knowledge regarding the situation and conditions of the target group will become apparent. This particular target group is very specific. Since there are certain obstacles for international organizations, governments and local authorities to access the information regarding the target group, your organization will be in a unique position to provide these stakeholders with information. The purpose of inspiring you to create an agenda for advocacy is to take advantage of this position.

## ***Step 3: DO IT***

This section is a compilation of our thoughts and experiences regarding advocacy work. Advocacy work must be planned and developed in relation to the political and social context an organization is working in. Therefore, this part is not meant to be a guide, but just some shared experiences and inspiration.

### ◆ *The use of personal stories - opportunities and challenges*

Personal stories can be an excellent way to enlighten the general public or relevant stakeholders of the situation for a target group. This has been a method ever since the early days of broadcasted charity. Sentimental commercials inspire people to take up the phone and give money. We also use personal stories sometimes in our advocacy work, but the use of personal stories cannot be taken for granted. A member of the target group might be willing to share their unique story as a part of their own activist agenda. Still, it is important to highlight the different opportunities and the probable general knowledge of the particular target group when facilitating activism. The risk of reducing the knowledge a person lived experience to an individual case is counterproductive and must be avoided. The key to using personal stories successfully is to facilitate and not to make the message fit into a pre-planned agenda. For many people telling or writing a personal story is a way to relive a trauma. However, the possible outcome of sharing it can make it worth it as a part of their activism. Treating this kind of sharing as activism is the core of our approach. When we forward requests from external actors, the standard is that the contributor is paid.

### ◆ *Best practice: NCY Magazine*

In November 2021 *Newcomers Youth* is launching the first edition of the *NCY Magazine*. The magazine has been an ongoing project where our members have contributed with an article of their choice. The authors have chosen the topic themselves, written the article and gotten professional feedback from a journalist. Members who did not want to write articles but still contributed sent us their photographs, art, poetry, or participated in a fashion photoshoot.

### ◆ *Facilitating the target group's activism*

What we experienced in *Newcomers Youth* was that this target group is of interest because of the individual's vulnerability. In order not to fall into white savior complex traps, we are cautious when putting together an agenda and creating opportunities for the target group to communicate their message. You can find a more comprehensive guide on how to be the facilitator of the

target group's activism. Here we just want to mention that this is the key to everything we do. In order to ensure a smooth and efficient facilitation/procedure, it is important to clearly identify and comprehend your own role and position in that project or organization.

We have realized that if we work within our project or organization as facilitators, but not as educators or leaders, it positively impacts on the dynamics of the project, which in its turn fosters the empowerment of the community. The main goal of what we want to accomplish (which for us is creating a better future for young LGBTQI asylum seekers) does not always feel within reach. But the personal development part and what activism can mean for an individual when it comes to self-love, confidence and empowerment is just as important.

### ◆ *Best practice: Activist workshops*

The *Activist Workshops* are gatherings to inspire and facilitate the members' own activism. To read more about them - go to chapter two!

### ◆ *The balance of professionalism and activism*

In *Newcomers Youth*, we have chosen not only to have an activist but also a professional approach. That means we have a lawyer specialized in asylum law working for the project. From the beginning the lawyer's role was to give legal counseling to the members and provide lectures to other lawyers, interpreters, and other professionals meeting our target group. The role of the lawyer developed as we saw the lack of knowledge regarding the situation for our target group among the relevant stakeholders and the need for a migration policy expert instead of a lawyer. The migration policy expert is working mainly with advocacy. The goal was to collect the already available information regarding our target group (which is very limited, taking into account the particular youth perspective) and write our own reports and share them with the relevant stakeholders, which we did. The experience of having our own professional material and not only the collected expertise of the target group is that it adds layers and concretizes the members' message, especially regarding the recommendations and the assessment of LGBTQI asylum cases, which are written from a purely legal perspective. The choice of hiring a lawyer in the project was from the beginning based on the target group's need for legal counseling. The choice to employ a migration policy expert was based on the target group's need for a reformed asylum system to get a fair trial. Lastly, we want to emphasize that professional positions, as lawyers are not a must to be a relevant voice to advocate. It is not always possible either, financially speaking.

### ◆ *Benefits of cooperation and network of partners*

In the national context where *Newcomers Youth* is operating, LGBTQI rights are non-controversial, and the trade is therefore beneficial for the stakeholders. Therefore, we are careful in the choice of co-operations and actions. For instance, if we are invited to be a stakeholder in a project where we cannot affect its outcomes, we never appear as an "approval stamp" in such project.

### ◆ *The different kinds of partnerships*

#### Civil society:

Create partnerships with other civil society organizations to share an experience or strengthen the advocacy message. The partnership should be beneficial for both parties and strengthen the fulfillment of your shared goals.

#### National Agencies:

What kind of partnerships or collaborations can you possibly create together with the national agencies in your country? One recommendation is to come up with possible ideas and present finished proposals. Our experience has been that many of the relevant national agencies want to hear the voices of our target group but don't know how to reach out. As an organization you can be the crucial link in between.

#### National and local governments:

Like the national agencies, the national and local governments often need and request the information you can provide regarding a particular target group. Be aware of not being used for political goodwill, though, and carefully analyze regularly what your organization and especially the target group get in return.

#### Private sector:

We have some experience when it comes to cooperating with the private sector. This part has never been closely linked to advocacy work. However, there are different risks to be measured before going into a partnership with actors of the private sector, especially if they are profit-based. However, for now, we lack the experience, but if your organization has it, we would love to hear all about it!

### ◆ Best practice: Dialogue with the Swedish Migration Agency

When *Newcomers Youth* started, as previously mentioned, the focus was on providing various services for the target group and members. As the work progressed, we realized that we were one of the few stakeholders who actually met the target group in an open and separatist setting, making us a golden resource for insights and information regarding the situation for the target group. We decided to take advantage of our position. *The Swedish Migration Agency* has a mission issued by the government to work with LGBTIQ issues. This mission includes cooperating with relevant representatives from civil society and especially LGBTIQ organizations. Therefore, we proposed creating dialogue meetings with the *Swedish Migration Agency* and our parent organization, *RFSL*. The dialogue meetings focus on different topics and themes each time, and we hold meetings every other month. These meetings mean that we have a direct link to the Swedish Migration Agency to provide direct feedback on how the system works in reality. In this way, we can act as consultants. In exchange, the *Swedish Migration Agency* fulfills one part of their government mission and receives accurate and relevant information regularly. The dialogue was established in 2018 and is still ongoing.



## Part IV.

# Recommendations, summary, and ideas for the youth policies based on both theoretical knowledge and practical experience with the target group

### ◆ *Prepare and educate the coordination team and leaders*

Read the available methodological materials from *Newcomers Youth* and collect information regarding the situation of the target group in your country/local community. Consult with other NGOs, National Agencies, local authorities.

### ◆ *Create a plan on how to reach the target group*

Reaching out to the group often includes a combination of different methods and collaboration with other actors who work with asylum and queer rights.

### ◆ *Understand what safety means to the participants that you meet*

Members of the target group often come from unsafe environments and traumatic settings. It is important to specify what "safety" means to the youth participating in your activities. Understanding the target group and especially the particular group that you will be working with, responding in a good way to their needs and finding a solution to their challenges is a complex and ongoing process.

### ◆ *Create the safe space*

The basic guideline before developing any concrete method and activity plan is to create an environment where everyone can feel safe and relaxed. This should be a process where the main working principles are developed in consultation with the participants.

### ◆ *Make an inventory of the target group's needs (and regularly update it!)*

In order to make the project activities relevant and appealing for members of the target group, make sure to know the needs and later on develop the activity plan in direct relation to their needs.

### ◆ *Plan the activities of your project<sup>1</sup>*

This should be done together with the participants. Make sure to have the facilitator perspective, rather than the educator perspective during the development of the plan. If the participants request certain educational activities the roles can change later on, but in the planning stage of the project make sure the participants feel comfortable to take on the role as experts of their own situation, needs and wishes.

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<sup>1</sup>Some activities have to be planned at an earlier stage. In *Newcomers Youth* we started with more easygoing activities in order to establish our meeting place as a safe space, and later on planned more advanced and challenging activities.



