



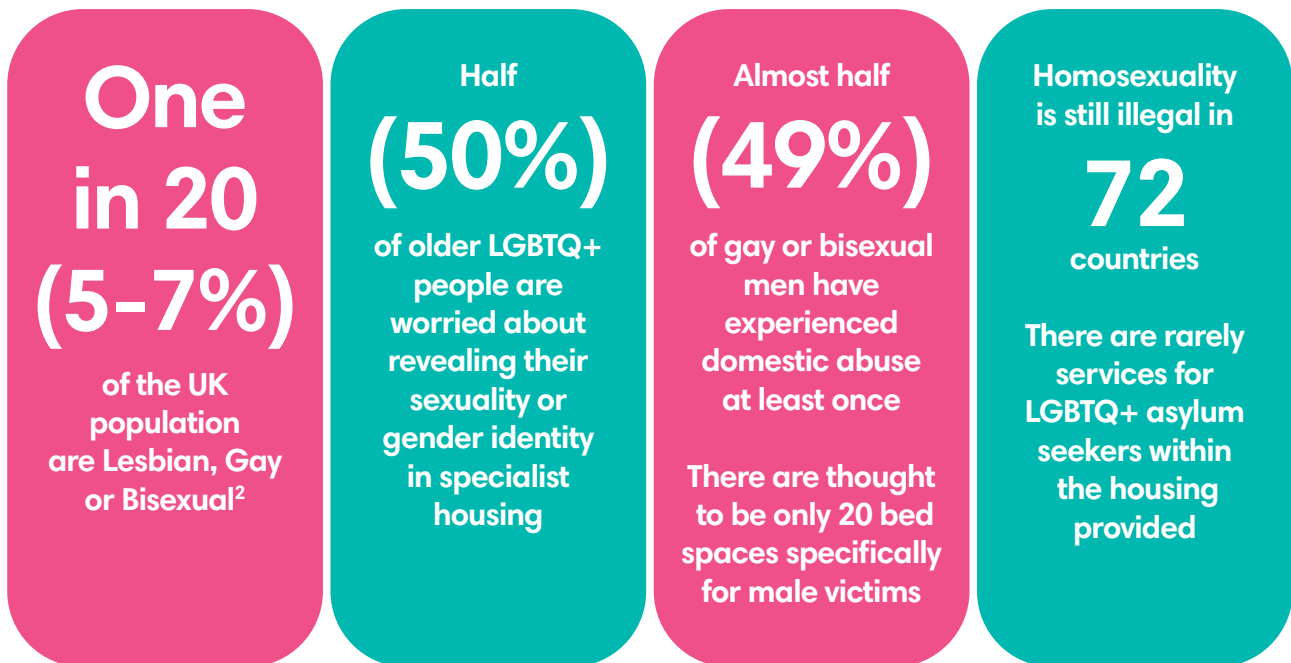
Left out: Why many LGBTQ+ people aren't accessing their right to housing in the UK

**world
habitat
report**



Introduction

We want to use this report to highlight the housing issues faced by LGBTQ+ people which cause high levels of hardship, despite getting very little attention in the housing sector, let alone beyond it¹. When you look at the way LGBTQ+ people are disproportionately affected by housing problems, it is easy to see why it is important to give this issue particular attention.



This report draws together evidence which looks at LGBTQ+ housing as an issue from different perspectives. We offer some recommendations which reflect common issues across research findings and propose that we:

- **work towards better data and better dialogue so the needs of LGBTQ+ people can be better understood;**
- **provide training and raise awareness so LGBTQ+ housing issues are better catered for;**
- **carry out focused research and support knowledge-transfer so good practice in supporting LGBTQ+ people in housing can be found and shared;**
- **dedicate time and resources to community action as this often leads to creative and responsive solutions;**
- **bring forward policy amendments to create positive change for LGBTQ+ people (in housing and beyond);**
- **pay real attention to diversity – there are groups within groups, and LGBTQ+ is no different. Engagement and dialogue is essential; and**
- **collaborate. People don't fit neatly into categories, so different services could work together to make people's complex challenges easier to deal with.**

¹ Stonewall (a UK charity for LGBT rights) published "LGBT in Britain; Hate Crime and Discrimination" in 2017. The report highlights the widespread abuse still being suffered by LGBTQ+ people
https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/lgbt_in_britain_hate_crime.pdf

² Data by Stonewall, in Gay Britain: what do the statistics say?, The Guardian, 3 October 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/reality-check/2013/oct/03/gay-britain-what-do-statistics-say>

LGBTQ+ people: invisible minorities in the housing system

In 2017 the UK celebrated fifty years since the end of the criminalisation of homosexuality. This was marked by significant coverage and many opportunities to reflect on how the country has changed over the last decades. In fact, compared to other countries, the UK can quite confidently claim a good degree of progress when it comes to Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans and Queer + (LGBTQ+) rights and the steps taken towards equality, from equal marriage, to being able to start a family, having inheritance rights and anti-discrimination laws, etc. One might also be tempted to believe that social acceptance and protection of LGBTQ+ people has been achieved.

Unfortunately, a closer look at aspects such as housing access reveals a different picture. Despite changes in legislation and greater tolerance in society, LGBTQ+ people still suffer disproportionately from certain housing issues. In many cases this is linked to a mix of personal experiences of homo/bi/transphobia⁴, wider institutional failures and a lack of understanding of LGBTQ+ needs.

Housing needs can be particularly severe if LGBTQ+ people are also faced with vulnerabilities such as poverty, young or old age, abuse and racial discrimination.

Limited awareness, funding and research on understanding and solving LGBTQ+ housing issues worsen the situation. As a result, LGBTQ+ remain invisible minorities in a housing system that does not always keep them safe.

Although there are different housing issues LGBTQ+ people could be faced with, we have outlined four cases which we consider as particularly significant. These are: homelessness, old age, domestic abuse and asylum seeking. We also present a series of recommendations for the advancement of LGBTQ+ housing rights.

Note: Given that currently available resources focus mostly on LGBT people and less so on other gender and sexual minorities, this report is based largely on evidence from these groups. The terminology varies throughout the report to reflect the sources the evidence came from. But we hope to clarify that all sexual and gender minorities are equally important to understand and recognise. It is likely that they would experience similar yet unique housing issues. If you do have information on housing and gender and sexual minorities other than LGBT people – we would be interested in hearing from you.

Jade*, a trans woman, spent time in a male prison following a custodial sentence for a drugs-related offence. Jade has a long history of offending and she feels this is because she has never been able to express her true-self. She is currently living in a male bail hostel and dresses in male clothing. However, she wishes to present in a visually more feminine way but she feels trapped as she is forced to live in an all-male environment.

Case study by Stonewall Housing

*Name has been changed

³ The acronym LGBTQ+ stands for Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans Queer, and the + represents other gender and sexual minorities such as Genderqueer, Intersex, Asexual (more extensive list and description here). <http://itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2013/01/a-comprehensive-list-of-lgbtq-term-definitions/>

⁴ Definition: Range of negative attitudes (e.g. fear, anger, intolerance, resentment, lack of recognition, or discomfort) that one may have towards members of LGBTQ+ community. This attitude can also focus on specific groups e.g. biphobia and transphobia target bisexual and trans people.

Homelessness

Stonewall Housing, an LGBTQ+ charity supporting people in housing need, consider that:

Around a third
(30%)

of the homeless population in urban areas is estimated to be LGBTQ+⁵.

Additionally, trans people are disproportionately affected by homelessness. The latest report shows one in four

(25%)

of surveyed trans people have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives⁶.

Youth homelessness is also significant, as around one in four

(24%)

of homeless people under 25 are thought to be LGBTQ+⁷.

Homelessness can affect anyone for a whole range of reasons. Yet, LGBTQ+ people can be more prone to rough sleeping or sofa surfing if their experiences have led them to feel unsafe or unwelcome in their homes or neighbourhoods. Some are forced to leave home due to lack of acceptance of who they are.

A survey by the Albert Kennedy Trust, a charity dedicated to supporting LGBTQ+ homeless young people, found that about more than three in every four (77 per cent) of young LGBTQ+ people surveyed consider their sexual or gender identity as the main cause of rejection from home. Identifying as LGBTQ+ can have an impact on mental health and wellbeing. Young LGBTQ+ people might suffer trauma from homophobic bullying, internalised homophobia, sexual exploitation, or other problems linked to their gender identity. This experience can manifest in behaviours or mental states which eventually lead to conflict or alienation in the home. So while being LGBTQ+ is not always a direct cause of parental rejection, a young person's sexuality and gender identity can be a strong influence over one's experience of homelessness⁸. Additionally, LGBTQ+ young people experiencing homelessness are more likely to be victims of violence and sexual exploitation, substance abuse, and take part in risky sexual behaviour, compared to non-LGBTQ+ homeless young people⁹.

What makes the situation worse is that there is a widespread lack of recognition, awareness and training on gender and sexual minorities in housing and homelessness services. Only 2.6 per cent of the housing services - surveyed by the Albert Kennedy Trust - recognised the unique needs of homeless LGBTQ+ young people and had targeted services. It is therefore unsurprising that the Albert Kennedy Trust and Stonewall Housing found that LGBTQ+ homeless people are less likely to seek help or support than non-LGBTQ+ peers, and feel less confident to approach services out of fear of discrimination¹⁰.

⁵ 'Hidden in Plain Sight: Homelessness Amongst Lesbian and Gay Youth', O'Connor W. and Nolloy D. (2003). National Centre for Social Research, in Sexuality and Homelessness, 2005, Crisis <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/23798/hidden-plain-sight-homelessness.pdf> and <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/>
⁶ LGBT in Britain: Trans Report, Stonewall, March 2018. <http://homelesshub.ca/resource/lgbt-britain-trans-report>
⁷ LGBT Youth Homelessness: A UK scoping of A U National Scoping Of Cause, Prevalence, Response, And Outcome. <https://www.akt.org.uk/research>

⁸ 'Hidden in Plain Sight: Homelessness Amongst Lesbian and Gay Youth', O'Connor W. and Nolloy D. (2003). National Centre for Social Research. <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/23798/hidden-plain-sight-homelessness.pdf>
⁹ LGBT Youth Homelessness: A UK National Scoping Of Cause, Prevalence, Response, And Outcome, Albert Kennedy Trust. <https://www.akt.org.uk/research>
¹⁰ LGBT Youth Homelessness: A UK National Scoping Of Cause, Prevalence, Response, And Outcome, Albert Kennedy Trust. <https://www.akt.org.uk/research>

Equalities monitoring does not necessarily include sexuality and gender identity. Around one in three (30 per cent) of agencies still fail to monitor this in shelter or accommodation for homeless young people¹¹. As a result, many homelessness services do not know who might have specific needs. Even when questions around orientation and gender are asked, this is sometimes done in a survey form and never discussed in person, making it more of a statistical exercise than a way to provide help and the opportunity for people to discuss their needs. Despite being a sensitive topic, organisations such as Stonewall Housing recommend monitoring and creating channels for discussing LGBTQ+ identity and needs within homelessness services. The 'concluding thoughts' section has more detail.

Fortunately there are some organisations that specifically recognise and tackle LGBTQ+ homelessness. Stonewall Housing and the Albert Kennedy Trust offer many services to support access to housing, and in 2017 a new community-led group – 'The Outside Project' – converted a tour bus into a 12-bed shelter for LGBTQ+ people. In fact, the bus is more than just an overnight shelter. It is home to various events and workshops, provides a sober space, and serves as a community and meeting point. These charities and grassroots organisations show great initiative from people who want structural inequalities around homelessness to be recognised and addressed. They have strived to not only provide support but also greater visibility of the issue, and hope to the LGBTQ+ homeless population.

Aga* is a bisexual 38-year-old woman from Poland. She had been rough sleeping around King's Cross for six months. She first became homeless after her relationship broke down and had to leave her ex-partner's home. She stayed at various places until running out of options which forced her to live on the streets. She is diagnosed with Schizophrenia, takes medication and is already linked-in with mental health services. Aga sex-works in the King's Cross area and has significant substance misuse issues. She has been to the local council several times to make a homeless application but has been turned down due to eligibility as she has not worked in the UK long enough to be assisted for housing and does not have a residency card.

Case study by Stonewall Housing

*Name has been changed

In 2012, Joe* was a young 22-year-old gay man. He expressed feeling lost in the world, and was confused and in denial about his sexuality. When he felt things could not get any worse, he suddenly lost his mum. His whole world flipped upside down. He became homeless. He was not only struggling to deal with the grief of losing his mum but also spent his time at friends' houses, staying with ex-partners and – on a few occasions – doing his best to try and find somewhere safe to stay at night.

Case study from Stonewall Housing

*Name has been changed

¹¹ LGBT Youth Homelessness: A UK National Scoping Of Cause, Prevalence, Response, And Outcome, Albert Kennedy Trust. <https://www.akt.org.uk/research>

Older People

Ageing can be a challenging process for all, but being LGBTQ+ can add specific layers of fragility. Paul Martin, chief executive of the LGBT Foundation, claims, 'the charity's research showed that more than half of the lesbian, gay and bisexual people over 55 felt their sexual orientation would have a negative impact on getting older, with social isolation identified as a major concern.'¹²

Care and support services tend to oversee the sexual and gender identities of older LGBTQ+ people, and therefore fail to meet their specific needs. In 2016, Stonewall Housing stated, 'Older LGBT+ people in the UK continue to report that they do not have confidence in mainstream housing, support and care providers to offer safe and appropriate services that recognise and respond to their life experiences. They have ongoing concerns about the risk of harassment and abuse if they are open about their sexuality'¹³.

The assumption that service users are non-LGBTQ+ (institutionalised heterosexism and cisgenderism¹⁴) leads many people to 'go back into the closet' out of fear of a lack of acceptance by support providers or by other service users. Having to erase a large part of one's history and identity to access services which allow you to be housed or to have help in your own house can be very distressing¹⁵.

Services do not systematically include LGBTQ+ related activities or initiatives, and care homes might be located far from other organisations or places where LGBTQ+ people can feel part of an accepting community.

In addition, discrimination in accessing housing (for example, evictions based on homo/bi/transphobia) and hate crimes can make living environments unsafe and threatening for LGBTQ+ people. Many people remain unaware of the protection and legislation available to respond to these threats, or might not be sure how to obtain help. Old age can add further barriers to navigating these systems. Currently older LGBTQ+ people are less likely to have a partner or children than non-LGBTQ+ older people¹⁶. This can lead to increased isolation. Alone and without support from informal networks, addressing and overcoming barriers to housing can be very difficult.

¹² 'Manchester city council to create UK's first LGBT retirement home', The Guardian, 21 Feb 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/21/manchester-city-council-to-create-uks-first-lgbt-retirement-home>

¹³ Building safe choices LGBT housing futures: a feasibility study, Stonewall Housing, 2016. http://www.buildingsafechoices.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/BuildingSafeChoices_full.pdf

¹⁴ Definition: heterosexism can be defined as a way of behaving that grants preferential treatment to heterosexual people, reinforces the idea that heterosexuality is somehow better or more "right" than queerness, or makes other sexualities invisible. This can be manifested at an individual level (through a person's beliefs and behaviours) or in a structural and

systematic way, which is known as institutional heterosexism. This for example leads to services, language, products, information being designed and tailored for people that do not belong to sexual minorities, and without their input. The equivalent term regarding gender minorities is cisgenderism.

¹⁵ Building safe choices LGBT housing futures: a feasibility study, Stonewall Housing, 2016. http://www.buildingsafechoices.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/BuildingSafeChoices_full.pdf

¹⁶ Building a sense of community: Including older LGBT in the way we develop and deliver housing with care, Tina Wathern, Housing Learning and Improvement Network, 2013. https://www.housinglin.org.uk/_assets/Resources/Housing/Support_materials/Viewpoints/HLIN_Viewpoint39_LGBT.pdf

Stonewall Housing has also been looking at the feasibility of specialist housing for older LGBTQ+ people. This included learning from housing projects of this type which have been successfully trialled in the United States, for example, Triangle Square Apartments in Los Angeles, John C. Anderson Apartments in Philadelphia and Spirit on Lake in Minneapolis¹⁷. These US LGBTQ+ specialist housing projects are not exclusively for the use of LGBTQ+ people. Instead, they make sure the scheme and neighbourhood are welcoming and celebrate gender and sexual minorities, whilst also accommodating many other diverse non-LGBTQ+ people (including a large share of Russian and Somali residents for example). These schemes include community amenities and services, such as libraries, gardens or event and meeting spaces, which reflect the needs of residents and the local community. Demand for solutions like this in the UK eventually resulted in Manchester City Council announcing in February 2017 they will host the first extra care scheme in Britain catering specifically to LGBTQ+ people¹⁸.

Nancy* is a 68-year-old lesbian. She was harassed out of the house she owned in a Derbyshire village by local people who verbally abused her, vandalised her camper van and spread untrue gossip about her. She moved to sheltered accommodation in Hackney and was determined to keep her sexuality under wraps at her new home until she fully trusted people. She compared her first 12 months in London as 'like having a split personality' and acknowledges that she was lonely and isolated and felt down quite often; "I couldn't really tell them anything about myself. I could talk about the past and my children, but I couldn't say anything about the real me. It was almost like speaking a different language."

Case study by Stonewall Housing

*Name has been changed

¹⁷ Bob Green, Executive Director of Stonewall Housing, has visited three LGBTQ+ housing projects in the USA and describes his experience here. <https://www.facebook.com/pg/StonewallHousing/videos/>

¹⁸ 'Manchester city council to create UK's first LGBT retirement home', The Guardian, 21 Feb 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/21/manchester-city-council-to-create-uks-first-lgbt-retirement-home>

Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse¹⁹ is also an area where LGBTQ+ people have specific needs, but where widespread institutional heterosexism and cisgenderism erase and undermine their experiences. Nonetheless, this problem is unfortunately prominent, and seems to particularly affect men. The LGBTQ+ charity Stonewall claims:

One in four **(25%)** of lesbian and bi women have experienced domestic abuse in a relationship.

Two in three **(66%)** of those say the perpetrator was a woman, and one in three **(33%)** a man.

Almost half **(49%)** of all gay and bi men have experienced at least one incident of domestic abuse from a family member or partner since the age of 16²⁰.

In addition, a recent report by Stonewall claims that more than one in four (28 per cent) of trans people in a relationship surveyed have faced domestic abuse from a partner in the last year²¹. Despite this, ideas and discussions about responding to domestic abuse are based on the assumption that this concerns cis²² straight males using their power over cis straight women. Those who do not fit this model risk missing out on support services, as the providers might not have an adequate understanding of their situation and needs.

This is worsened by the fact that legislation and advocacy focus almost exclusively on violence

against women and girls specifically. This translates into limited attention and funding streams to organisations working with LGBTQ+ victims, or to increase police, social and health services and other organisations' training on LGBTQ+ issues. Over the last decade in particular, there has been a dramatic reduction in financial support towards organisations working in this field, causing the LGBT Domestic Abuse Forum, Broken Rainbow, PACE and other key projects to shut down or transfer their activities. Some of the only operating groups remaining are part of the London LGBT Domestic Abuse Partnership (DAP), who also operate a national helpline to support people beyond London.

This situation leaves many LGBTQ+ people experiencing domestic abuse unsupported. In a survey run by ROAR (domestic abuse advocacy service by Stonewall Housing), LGBTQ+ survivors of domestic violence were encouraged to safely share their thoughts and experiences. This research showed that more than two in every three (68 per cent) of respondents had not tried to find advice, support, or protection from organisations/services, with about one in four (24 per cent) claiming they didn't know where to get help.

LGBTQ+ people might experience additional layers of difficulty in leaving abusive situations linked to certain vulnerabilities of gender and sexual minorities. For example, there could be a fear of not finding acceptance beyond the abusive relationship because of one's sexuality or gender identity. The abuser might use this fear as a form of power over the victim. Sexuality can also be used as a way of controlling someone by, for example, threatening to 'out' them to their family or employers²³. Some people facing rejection from home are dependent on abusive partners or people to secure a roof over their heads. From one group surveyed by ROAR, around one in seven (14 per cent) claimed they didn't leave the relationship because they 'didn't have anywhere else to go'.

¹⁹ All statistics and findings in this section from ROAR: Because silence is deadly LGBT domestic abuse forum - A report on the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans* survivors of domestic violence and abuse, Stonewall Housing, 2014, unless otherwise stated. http://lgbtdaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/ROAR_full_v2.pdf

²⁰ Stonewall's page on Domestic Violence. <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/criminal-law/domestic-violence>

²¹ LGBT in Britain: Trans Report, Stonewall, March 2018. <http://homelesshub.ca/resource/lgbt-britain-trans-report>

²² Definition of cis/cisgender: a person whose gender identity and biological sex assigned at birth align (e.g., man and male-assigned). A simple way to think about it is if a person is not trans or non-binary (do not identify with being strictly either male or female), they are cis/cisgender.

²³ Domestic violence and sexuality - what's love got to do with it? <http://policypress.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1332/policypress/9781447307433.001.0001/upso-9781447307433>

Survivors of domestic violence have also expressed a general culture of distrust towards the police, which is in part entrenched in a past where homosexuality used to be illegal, in addition to current fears of societal homophobia and lack of acceptance. There have also been claims of not wanting to draw negative attention to the LGBTQ+ community regarding issues of violence and abuse.

Some forms of domestic abuse are specifically based on homo/bi/transphobic attitudes. For example, forced heterosexual marriage, so-called honour-based violence²⁴, corrective rape²⁵, and other forms of physical or verbal abuse are used to enforce heterosexuality or conformity with gender stereotypes.

All these issues translate into unsafe environments for LGBTQ+ people. And the lack of institutional and societal preparedness for this heightens the barriers to securing safe homes for LGBTQ+ people.

In the case of the survey carried out by ROAR, one in six (16.5 per cent) of LGBTQ+ victims of domestic violence had lost their home, were forced to leave home or became captive in their own home as a direct result of domestic abuse. This links violence directly to homelessness. Other reported situations of hardship included being pushed into increased debt, illegal activity, crime, antisocial behaviour and unemployment. Negative effects on mental, physical and sexual health, educational achievements, parenting and childhood development were also reported by the group to be outcomes of abuse.

For those attempting to escape from an abusive relationship, there are limited emergency facilities with an LGBTQ+ focus. Men are particularly affected by this, as options for gay, bisexual and trans men specifically are almost non-existent, despite being, on average, more (insert commas around 'on average' likely to experience domestic abuse than their peers. In fact, whilst there are several women-specific refuges for victims of domestic abuse, there are extremely limited similar

options for men (the charity ManKind Initiative only estimates 20 bed spaces for male victims in the UK²⁶). They would have to rely on standard services for homeless people which are likely to fall short of their specific needs.

Also, women-specific services might be ill-equipped to understand the specific cases of lesbian, bi or trans women. In fact, respondents claim to have experienced homo/bi/transphobia in various services when attempting to get help to secure a safe environment.

From the age of seven Bonnie* had been abused by her cousin. Aged 14, she attempted to end the abuse but the perpetrator made violent threats. The case was investigated by the Police, but no further action was taken due to lack of evidence and the abuse continued until she was 21. Bonnie, who is lesbian, partially deaf and has been diagnosed as Bipolar, also has physical health problems including seizures and asthma. She has a history of self-harm and has attempted suicide more than twenty times and has been sectioned. Bonnie has been staying in a bed and breakfast hostel without any regular support or monitoring. Bonnie's partner also has mental health problems.

Case study from Stonewall Housing

*Name has been changed

²⁴ Definition: violence committed by close or extended family motivated by a perceived need to restore reputation within the community, which is presumed to have been damaged by the behaviour of the victim.

²⁵ Definition: Rape committed because of the victim's perceived sexual orientation or gender identity with the intention by the perpetrator to force the victim to take up heterosexual

and/or cisgender behaviour

²⁶ Briefing: Refuges and safe houses for male victims of domestic abuse, ManKind Initiative, July 2016. <http://new.mankind.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Refuges-for-Male-Victims-of-Domestic-Abuse-Briefing-July-2016.pdf>

Refugees/Asylum seekers

Homosexuality is still illegal in 72 countries worldwide. In seven it is punishable by death. Only 50 countries recognise trans people's rights and identity²⁷. This forces many to seek asylum in various countries, including the UK.

The UK Border Agency (UKBA) did not collect and compile statistical information on sexual orientation or gender identity until July 2011, and results have not been made public so far. Nonetheless, the report 'Over Not Out' estimates around 1,800 lesbian, gay, or bisexual people made asylum claims in 2008. The number of trans asylum seekers is also difficult to define - 'Over Not Out' estimated this at around 20-30 people per year.

Refugees and asylum seekers are in general a vulnerable section of the population, faced with a large number of challenges, including discrimination, barriers to housing, physical and mental health and limited financial resources. LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and refugees face an additional set of difficulties, which affect their wellbeing in several ways, including their housing opportunities.

Over Not Out²⁸ is the first study on the housing and homelessness issues facing LGBTQ+ asylum seekers in the UK and was based on interviews with 40²⁹ LGBTQ+ asylum seekers from 15 different countries. The analysis demonstrates that LGBTQ+ asylum seekers face multiple disadvantages because of their status, sexual orientation or gender identity.

Most respondents interviewed for Over Not Out were living in privately rented accommodation. This was followed by local authority housing in multiple occupation, UK Border Agency asylum support accommodation, and Social Services asylum support respectively, with two respondents experiencing homelessness. In total, three in every five (60 per cent) respondents were living

with friends and partners in privately rented accommodation or in houses of multiple occupation. Personal ties were key to where and with whom many LGBTQ+ asylum seekers lived.

One of the main findings was that most of the housing systems mentioned above did not offer good levels of protection and security. For example, within privately rented accommodation the interviewed LGBTQ+ asylum seekers were not paying rent, but rather were allowed to stay by partners or friends. In this situation of hidden homelessness they have no protection against eviction, limited ability to approach landlords about repairs and home improvements, and are dependent on their host. This makes them vulnerable to exploitation. Various respondents also said they had been subject to discrimination and harassment by landlords because of their LGBTQ+ status, or felt unsafe about their sexual or gender identity being revealed.

Further issues were revealed about the UK Border Agency housing and other supported housing which accommodates asylum seekers while their asylum claim is being processed.

Respondents revealed numerous negative experiences linked to harassment and homo/bi/transphobic discrimination by other occupiers or by property managers. These instances range from verbal abuse to rape attempts. There are no measures in place to guarantee that asylum seekers identifying as LGBTQ+ will be placed with other occupiers that are accepting of their gender identity or sexual orientation, and limited actions are taken against harassment. There are claims of no action being taken despite asylum seekers reporting not feeling safe. This indicates an absence of policy, procedures, and staff training regarding making housing safe for LGBTQ+ people.

²⁷ No Safe Refuge, Stonewall, 2017.

https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/no_safe_refuge.pdf

²⁸ Over Not Out, The housing and homelessness issues specific to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender asylum seekers, Michael Bell Associates, 2009.

<https://www.metropolitan.org.uk/images/Over-Not-Out.pdf>

²⁹ The objective of the report was to raise awareness of the issues and barriers LGBTQ+ asylum seekers face regarding accommodation and homelessness in London. Whilst this is a relatively small sample, it does offer qualitative insights into the conditions faced by LGBTQ+ asylum seekers. Previous to this report, there was no documentation of these issues.

When measures were taken, this usually involved the transfer of the LGBTQ+ person (not the transfer of the perpetrator) – once again without verifying the safety of the new place for gender and sexual minorities. This indicated that LGBTQ+ asylum seekers can be faced with frequent moves, uncertainty, lack of stability and poor protection.

The lack of safety in supported accommodation led some LGBTQ+ asylum seekers to leave, staying with friends or partners instead. This is treated as ‘voluntary abandonment’, which leads to losing any entitlement to housing provision by the UK government.

Numerous moves are common for the overall population of asylum seekers, yet ‘LGBT+ asylum seekers experiences are qualitatively different [because] homophobic and transphobic discrimination is often the trigger that causes frequent moving and homelessness.’³⁰

The Over Not Out report also indicates that half (50 per cent) of interviewees dispersed outside London had moved back to be closer to friends and support networks. LGBTQ+ people are often dependent on friends, family, partners and support structures. Moving away from these networks created a sense of isolation that was difficult to cope with. The absence of LGBTQ+ community resources in dispersal areas was mentioned as a major reason to return to urban centres such as London or Manchester.

Nonetheless, having access to LGBTQ+ and community groups doesn’t automatically mean that support and understanding is easily found. In fact ‘LGBTI³¹ organisations [are often] ill-equipped to support asylum seekers and [Migrant and Refugee Community Organisations are] unwilling to acknowledge the existence and needs of LGBTI people in their communities.’³²

This two-fold level of discrimination, both as asylum seekers/refugees and as gender and sexual minorities, has been described as ‘Double Jeopardy’ by the 2013 report of the same name.

Since the first Over Not Out report there have been a few changes. These are documented in Over Not Out Refreshed 2012: An update on progress against the recommendations of the original Over Not Out Report³³. In particular – in December 2009 the Mayor of London published ‘London Enriched – The Mayor’s Refugee Integration Strategy’. This specifically acknowledges that LGBTQ+ refugees may face additional barriers to accessing decent housing, and are likely to face higher level risks of abuse and harassment.

Despite recognition of the issues facing LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers at a strategic level, stakeholders do not feel this has had an impact on the ground in terms of positive change. Stonewall Housing data shows that in the last year the number of asylum seekers and refugees approaching them had more than doubled. The report points to insufficient progress being made against a number of recommendations made to ensure asylum seekers from gender and sexual minorities live in safe and supportive environments.

³⁰ Over Not Out, The housing and homelessness issues specific to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender asylum seekers, Michael Bell Associates, 2009. <https://www.metropolitan.org.uk/images/Over-Not-Out.pdf>

³¹ LGBTI stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex. Intersex people are individuals born with a combination of any of several variations in sex characteristics (chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, genitals) that differs from the two expected patterns of male or female.

³² Double Jeopardy Project A final report on the Trust for London funded Double Jeopardy Project, Alasdair Stuart at MBARC, 2013. <https://www.scribd.com/document/357520060/Double-Jeopardy-Project-Report>

³³ Over Not Out Refreshed 2012: An update on progress against the original recommendations of the Over Not Out Report (2009), Alasdair Stuart of MBARC, 2012. <https://www.metropolitan.org.uk/images/Metropolitan-MF-LGBT-Over-Not-Out2012-final1.pdf>

In addition, the recently released No Safe Refuge report by Stonewall and UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group (UKLIG) has made the headlines³⁴ by highlighting the difficult conditions faced by asylum seekers in detention camps, and has managed to gather public attention³⁵ – although it is too early to say whether any actions will be taken as a result.

There is some good news: in October 2017 Micro Rainbow International opened the first safe house for LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers offering psychological support, life-coaching and business training in addition to a safe place to stay³⁶. A second home was opened in December, and Micro Rainbow International plans to increase its capacity to 40 beds by the end of 2018³⁷. Although the root causes of the issue remain, initiatives like this one are a step forward towards recognising housing needs and offering support to some of the most vulnerable LGBTQ+ people in the country.

³⁴ Government 'must end its detention of vulnerable LGBT asylum seekers', charities demand, The Independent, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/lgbt-asylum-seekers-amber-rudd-home-office-treatment-detention-centres-a7381756.html?platform=hootsuite>

³⁵ you can follow some of the conversation through the #NoSafeRefuge hashtag

³⁶ Gay and intersex asylum seekers find place to call home in Britain, place (Thomas Reuters Foundation), 2017. <http://www.thisisplace.org/?id=4130828f-83f2-42e7-ab98-2e91c5671c4b>

³⁷ MRI opens a 2nd house for LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees, Micro Rainbow International, 2017. <https://microrainbow.org/mri-opens-2nd-house-lgbti-asylum-seekers-refugees>

Concluding thoughts and next steps

Despite all the issues identified, a number of organisations are fully committed to making sure LGBTQ+ people do not continue to be disproportionately disadvantaged in accessing housing.

The hope is for everyone to live in decent, safe, affordable and accepting environments, where LGBTQ+ people can express who they are without fear, feel part of a community and have access to the right support.

A whole set of specific recommendations can be made to various stakeholders to help tackle the issues around housing for LGBTQ+ people. These will be different for each of the groups described above, and many have already been suggested in the resources referred to within this report. We nonetheless wanted to draw some overall reflections which seem relevant to all groups.

KEY CALL TO ACTION

Training and awareness raising:

Housing providers and housing services often have limited awareness about how to address LGBTQ+ issues and meet the needs of their residents/service users. Unless this changes, LGBTQ+ people will continue to lack access to housing.

Therefore, our headline recommendation is that all housing organisations must - by December 2020 - implement a programme of training to enable improvements in service design and how residents are supported.

This must be followed by a genuine commitment from all organisations to **deliver effective change based on the training**. This should be reflected in integrating lessons learned into the organisation's strategy, programme delivery, and monitoring and evaluation.

For example, Stonewall Housing provides specialist training to various actors within the housing sector – from workers in the construction industry, to policy makers, housing associations or homelessness service providers. Nonetheless, the housing sector will not invest in training unless they are aware of this issue in the first place!

Although LGBTQ+ housing needs have received a degree of attention in recent years, these issues remain underexplored and under acknowledged, and are largely absent in housing and urban development discussions, conferences or publications. More effort must be made to highlight the needs of LGBTQ+ people – with voices not only from the charity and activism sector – but also from housing professionals and academics, supported by research and examples of good practice.

Monitoring equalities, combined with support:

Monitoring equalities in services can feel like an intrusive practice, and sexuality and gender identity are amongst the most personal questions you can be asked about. Yet monitoring the number of LGBTQ+ people who need services is essential to understanding whether LGBTQ+ people are disproportionately affected by barriers to housing.

Monitoring equalities has to be done sensitively. People need to know why this information is being collected – as some might feel threatened by such questions. Some may not be ready or willing to disclose this information, and should not be pressured to, but it is important to be offered the chance. It is also important to create an environment that sends very clear, supportive, LGBTQ+ friendly messages. This can include signs and explanations at the entrance and inside buildings, information leaflets and use of inclusive language³⁸.

³⁸ Definition: language that avoids the use of certain expressions or words that might be considered to exclude particular groups of people, such as gender-specific words. An example can be using the word 'partner' instead of husband/wife/girlfriend/boyfriend, or asking what is a person's preferred pronoun instead of making assumptions, etc.

Increased research and knowledge exchange:

There is a limited amount of research available on the issues mentioned above. This is mostly linked to a lack of prioritisation of this topic by 'mainstream' organisations which might have the funding capacity for extensive data collection, and conversely, limited funding for LGBTQ+ specialised organisations that could take up more research in this field.

Despite these obstacles, the evidence gathered until now makes a strong enough case for recognising the difficulties faced by LGBTQ+ groups in accessing secure housing. This can form a basis for further research in the area – which can in turn influence policy and implementation of adequate solutions.

Knowledge exchange can play a vital role in inspiring change through collaboration, and through the sharing and transfer of good practice. For example, Stonewall Housing's Executive Director Bob Green visited LGBTQ+ housing projects in the US with the objective of learning useful lessons to inform similar developments in the UK. Increased financial and capacity support to organisations that are willing to carry out research and knowledge transfer, and implement what they find, could lead to tangible change and action.

Community action:

Mobilisation and community action can go a long way in raising visibility, creating connections between people with brilliant ideas, offer hope and solidarity to those faced with housing issues. Activism can also offer a critical perspective and create a pressure on institutions to come up with transparent and effective solutions. Community action can both be helpful in creating pressure for long-term change through advocacy work, but can also generate creative and responsive initiatives that help bring relief to people in housing need.

Changes in policy and tangible commitment:

Since evidence points to various inequalities experienced by LGBTQ+ people, it would seem that current policies fall short of sufficiently supporting gender and sexual minorities. More specific actions are needed to respond to the challenges mentioned in this report. Any actions taken have to be monitored over time to make sure they are constructive and lead to positive change (which brings us back to data collection and further research).

Policy change is an opportunity for policy makers and authorities to demonstrate active commitment to improving housing rights for LGBTQ+ people. This would increase the visibility of these issues, and bring more confidence to gender and sexual minorities affected by housing inequalities. The charity and civil society sector has the responsibility to keep challenging and advising for these changes until they are delivered.

Attention to intersectionality:

Another important aspect to consider is the intersectionality of housing issues, i.e. the overlapping of various layers of inequalities, power structures and discrimination. When fighting for housing rights and adequate policies it is important to keep in mind the diversity of LGBTQ+ people, and to reflect on whether minority voices within the community are represented.

For example, the needs of trans people and gender minorities are often overlooked, and they can be clearly distinct from the needs of LGB people. Similarly, the needs of an asylum seeker might not be the same as those of a UK resident. These needs might not be recognised if asylum seekers and their representatives are not part of debates and discussions around housing. Religious or ethnic minority groups might also have specific demands or needs. Therefore, working with a broad range of actors to create environments that are inclusive is a priority. There must be conversations that focus specifically on the needs of less represented groups, to ensure their voices are heard.

Collaboration to tackle complex discrimination:

There are opportunities for organisations working toward safe housing for different groups to work together. People experiencing housing difficulties might identify with many 'causes' – for example, a person might be LGBTQ+, a refugee or asylum seeker, very young or very old, and homeless. If services that cater for these groups worked together it would be much easier for people to access the help and support that is right for them.

In conclusion, despite the advancement of LGBTQ+ rights, gender and sexual minorities still experience many inequalities including increased barriers to secure housing. Funding cuts have affected the capacity of charities to respond to housing issues faced by LGBTQ+ people, with services around domestic violence and mental health taking a significant hit. Nonetheless, the tenacity of the charity sector and LGBTQ+ rights activists have produced significant pressure to highlight the difficulties encountered by LGBTQ+ groups. Faced with this evidence, the housing sector is confronted with the responsibility of acknowledging and adapting to the needs of LGBTQ+ people. We hope that through a commitment to increased research, monitoring, policy change and mobilisation around LGBTQ+ housing issues we can see evidence of positive and inspiring changes, and projects that ensure all LGBTQ+ people have access to safe housing.

If you know of projects that work towards solving housing or community issues faced by LGBTQ+ people – either in the UK or around the world – we would love to hear from you. Please email info@world-habitat.org. Also, follow @MariVeroUK on Twitter and #MyQueerCity for updates on our work on LGBTQ+ inclusive cities.

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Useful Contacts

Stonewall Housing, LGBTQ+ housing advice and support provider
Advice line 020 7359 5767
info@stonewallhousing.org

Albert Kennedy Trust, supporting LGBTQ+ youth facing homelessness
020 7831 6562 (London)
0161 228 3308 (Manchester)
0191 281 0099 (Newcastle)

Galop, LGBTQ+ anti-violence charity
020 7704 2040 (London),
0800 999 5428 (National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline)
info@galop.org.uk
help@galop.org.uk

Stonewall, National LGBTQ+ Charity,
020 7593 1850,
info@stonewall.org.uk
0131 474 8019 (Stonewall Scotland)
info@stonewallscotland.org.uk
029 2023 7744 (Stonewall Cymru)
cymru@stonewallcymru.org.uk

The Outside Project – London-based LGBTQ+ crisis shelter
carla.ecola@LGBTIQoutside.org

Micro Rainbow International, fighting LGBTI poverty and running safe house
info@micro-rainbow.org

UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group (UKLGIG), supporting LGBTQ+ asylum seekers
020 7922 7811
admin@uklgig.org.uk