



Held back: Poverty of LGBTQI refugees in the UK

AN INSIGHT INTO THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LGBTQI REFUGEES IN THE UK

2024

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Micro Rainbow core project team



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Foreword

I am delighted that Micro Rainbow, an organisation that I am very proud to be the patron of, is publishing this updated report on the lived experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) refugees in the United Kingdom.

In 2013, Micro Rainbow published a report into poverty among lesbian and gay refugees in the UK. In the ten years since the report's publication, there have been some key improvements in the lives of LGBTQI people around the world, however, we have also witnessed some frightening steps backwards. Since 2013, nine countries have decriminalised homosexuality; yet it remains illegal in 65. In many countries, homosexuality isn't illegal, but LGBTQI people face persecution, exclusion from society and are forced to live every day with the risk of violence.

Our African LGBTQI siblings are suffering increased levels of persecution due to the proposal and passing of particularly regressive laws towards LGBTQI people. In 2023, Uganda passed a severe new anti-LGBTQI law further criminalising LGBTQI people and those who associate with them. This reflects a trend across the continent, with similar legislation proposed in Kenya, Ghana, and Tanzania. This increasing repression of rights will only lead to more LGBTQI people fleeing for safety.

Micro Rainbow has been working with LGBTQI people who have been forced to flee their countries to try and find safety in the UK since 2012. This report successfully gives a voice to those who have navigated the difficult, hostile, and often traumatising UK asylum process. Attaining refugee status is a hugely significant step in the process of finding freedom. Having legal status in the UK means that they can start to move forward with the next stage of their lives.

However, much like in the 2013 report, this updated research shows that the challenges do not end when a person becomes a refugee. LGBTQI refugees still face considerable challenges. They are left feeling confused by the complex system, unheard by policy makers, and struggle to secure employment. This keeps refugees trapped in a cycle of poverty, undesirable housing, and other day-to-day struggles such as poor mental health.

2013's report started a conversation about how lesbian and gay refugees' lives are all too often overshadowed by poverty. 2023's research includes a wider range of LGBTQI identities in the refugee community, albeit with many of the same outcomes. Recommendations from the previous report have not been implemented, and refugees continue to struggle.

How the UK's former Conservative Government's "*hostile environment*" policy has distinctly and negatively impacted the lives of LGBTQI refugees in the UK. It gives a voice to the experiences of those who are now legally able to participate fully in the UK economy, but still encounter hostility and exclusion simply because of who they are.

We hope that the personal insights and perspectives shared in this report will contribute to greater awareness of the issues commonly faced and that the recommendations set out can help to guide much needed future change for refugees in the UK.



Phyll Opoku-Gyimah

CEO of UK Black Pride and
patron of Micro Rainbow

Executive summary

Reflections over the last ten years

It is ten years since Micro Rainbow's previous report on poverty, sexual orientation and refugees. Homosexuality is still criminalised in 65 countries, including by death penalty in 12 jurisdictions (Human Dignity Trust, 2023). The last ten years have seen the rise of populist governments, a global pandemic, record inflation, increased impact of climate change and geopolitical conflicts. These factors have contributed to an increase in individuals seeking asylum in the UK, which includes those from the LGBTQI community. In 2022, long-term immigration into the UK was estimated at 1.2 million, which is an increase of 221,000 compared with 2021 (Office for National Statistics, 2023).

For example, in 2023 it was announced that one of the Government's five priorities was to "stop the boats" and a bill was proposed to remove asylum seekers to Rwanda,

where LGBTQI people experience violence, blackmailing and persecution. However, following the election of the new Labour Government in July 2024, the Rwanda scheme was promptly scrapped.

In September 2023, the former government Home Secretary Suella Braverman stated that "*we will not be able to sustain an asylum system if in effect, simply being gay, or a woman, and fearful of discrimination in your country of origin is sufficient to qualify for protection.*" (Zeffman & Francis, 2023).

This is despite only 2% of all asylum claims in the UK in 2022 being due to sexual orientation (Home Office, 2023). It is in this context that LGBTQI refugees who safely make it to the UK and are granted refugee status continue to face the challenges set out in this report, including many of the same challenges that were identified by Micro Rainbow a decade ago.

Purpose of the report and research methodology

The purpose of this 2023 report is to discuss the lived experiences of LGBTQI refugees in the UK across three key themes: 1) safe housing and living; 2) social integration; and 3) moving on. Information collected through this research identifies new and emerging issues faced and compares challenges to those reported ten years ago.

While there are some encouraging developments, the life of an LGBTQI refugee in the UK is on the whole not an easy one. Within the report, challenges which are common to the UK refugee population are highlighted as well as issues specific to the LGBTQI refugee community. Additionally, the report recognises that within the LGBTQI refugee community, there may be distinctions in the lived experiences of individuals, with some experiencing specific challenges which may not be common to all LGBTQI refugees in the UK. For example,

the report highlights the integration challenges faced by trans individuals such as affording hormone treatment or gender affirming surgery, as well as instances of individuals being inappropriately housed in rooms shared with others of the opposite gender.

The lived experiences of LGBTQI refugees which are detailed in the report have been obtained by consulting with 98 Micro Rainbow service users from across the UK, through an anonymous survey as well as through more detailed one-to-one conversations. This is nearly twice the number of respondents who were involved in the research ten years ago. The 98 respondents came from 33 different countries. 48% identified as male, 34% identified as female, 8% identified as nonbinary, 7% preferred not to say, 1% identified as gender non-conforming, and 1% identified as trans.¹ In order to protect individual's privacy, where specific experiences are highlighted, the names of the individuals have been changed.

Core themes of the report



1. Safe housing and living



2. Integration



3. Moving on

¹ Note: The remaining 1% identified as bisexual, referring to their sexual orientation as opposed to their gender identity.

Findings and recommendations

The 'Key Findings' section below aims to summarise the lived experiences of our LGBTQI participants and identify the main challenges they commonly face, breaking this down across the three core themes of the report (safe housing and living; integration; and moving on). It provides a high-level overview of each theme's findings before they are considered in greater depth throughout the remainder of the report. The report also aims to highlight best practice examples of areas where LGBTQI refugee integration is working well, in order to understand how to maintain these successful elements of integration.

The 'Recommendations' section follows on from our key findings. It details the recommendations we consider necessary to improve LGBTQI refugee integration, crafted based on the findings from our survey and follow up conversations with participants. These recommendations are aimed at a number of different categories of stakeholders, including employers, policy makers and service providers, as well as other stakeholder categories listed in the section.

The remainder of the report explores each of the three core themes in turn, looking at the findings in further detail and setting out why the prescribed recommendations are necessary to combat the challenges highlighted.



Photograph taken by Micro Rainbow. This image is not of an individual featured in the report.

Key findings

Safe housing and living

One of the highest priorities for refugees is a sense of safety. Happily, over 90% of our respondents feel safer in the UK than they do in their home countries. That is not to say that safety is no longer a challenge. One of the key factors in that sense of safety is accommodation. In the context of the current housing crisis, this is a challenge for many people in the UK.

There are a variety of barriers and challenges to LGBTQI refugees finding safe, suitable and affordable accommodation, and having the financial means to be able to do so.

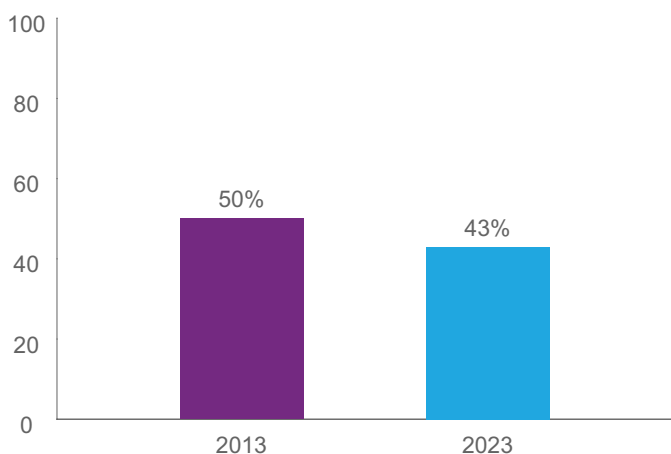
Previously, our 2013 report asked respondents whether they liked where they lived. 50% of respondents had concerns about their accommodation. In particular, neighbourhoods with a high concentration of people from respondents' home countries were seen by them as unsafe, as respondents would still feel subject to homophobic threats from members of their own community.

Respondents to our 2023 survey were asked the same question. There was a 7% increase in satisfaction with their housing situation. Despite the slight improvement, a relatively high percentage of respondents expressed nervousness about their accommodation, showing that accommodation continues to be an area of concern for LGBTQI refugees. Reasons for our 2023 respondents' disquiet included not feeling safe in the area or occasionally their own home, poor conditions, and a lack of privacy. Given the UK's housing affordability crisis, these are common concerns, and are especially prominent amongst people of limited means. Refugee Action, a charity, notes that "asylum seekers are victims of trauma and the impact of having insecure, poor-quality, precarious accommodation just keeps people in a space of insecurity" (Medlicott, 2023).

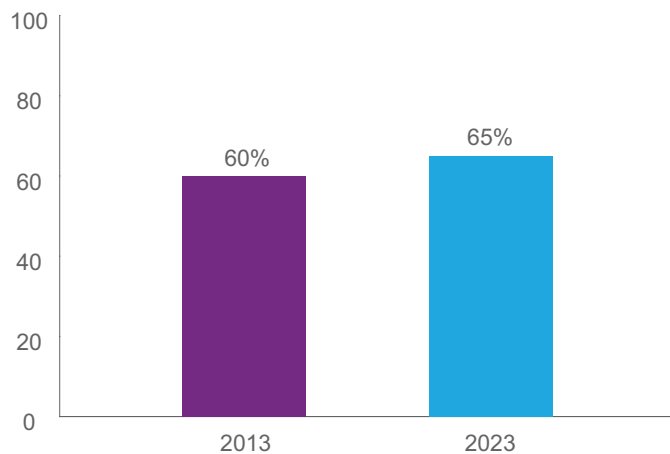
An emerging issue for respondents which was not reported in 2013, is the short time frame in which refugees are required to move out of asylum accommodation after their grant of refugee status ('move-on period'). Many end up living in hostels or inadequate temporary accommodation due to the limited time frames they are given to find new accommodation. Frequently, refugees become homeless because of this short time frame. Disturbingly, 41% of our respondents have experienced homelessness as asylum seekers and 39% as refugees. The scale of the refugee homelessness problem was recently highlighted by Centre for Homelessness Impact, who revealed that there had been a 223% rise in the number of people sleeping rough after leaving asylum housing in the second half of 2023. (Brown, Gill, Halsall, & Simcock, 2024)

The living expenses of refugees, and in particular LGBTQI refugees has remained a key issue over the last decade. A 2023 analysis from the Trussell Trust and Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that nine in 10 low-income households on universal credit are currently going without essentials (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2023). This aligns with our findings that 72% of our 2023 respondents do not have enough money to cover their living expenses, compared to 86% of respondents in 2013. Despite the 14% improvement, most of our respondents face a continuous struggle to meet their most fundamental needs. This includes being unable to afford food, rent, transport, toiletries and medical care (including gender affirming treatment). The Trussell Trust and Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimated that a single person needs around GBP120 each week to afford basic essentials excluding rent (The Trussell Trust and Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2023). However 43% of respondents spend just GBP300 or less per month on their living costs (excluding rent).

Concerns with current housing



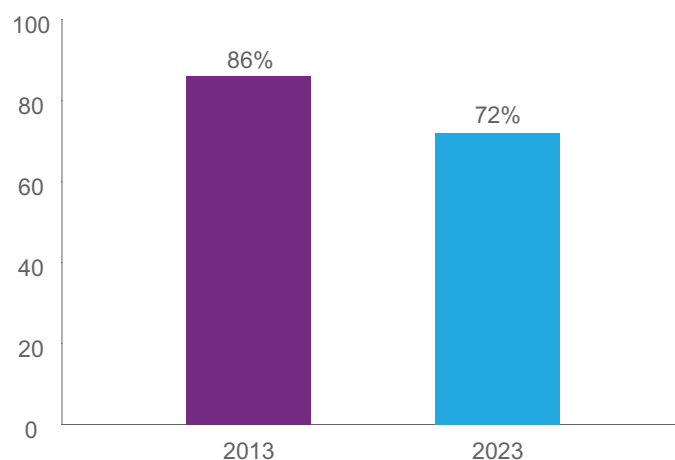
Insufficient funds to cover living expenses



Only 49% of respondents attribute their source of income solely to Universal Credit, with a further 16% reporting that their income is a combination of Universal Credit and either money from friends, savings or work, meaning that in total 65% of respondents are receiving Universal Credit. This is a 5% increase from the 60% of respondents who were receiving some form of benefits in 2013. The increased reliance on state support shows the difficulties faced by the refugee community in becoming financially self-sufficient. LGBTQI refugees also face practical challenges to their engagement in work and societal integration including difficulty accessing transport and connectivity issues. This is coupled with underlying issues such as societal prejudice and issues that result from poverty, loneliness and trauma.

Several of our recommendations (which are set out in the next section) contribute to both improving the financial stability of refugees and improving their housing situation in parallel. For example, permitting asylum seekers to work whilst their claim is pending would allow them to begin to save for a rental deposit, so that once granted refugee status, they may be able to secure accommodation. Subsidised travel for refugees would allow them to travel to and from work to job interviews and other appointments. It would also provide them with the freedom to visit new areas and consider alternative, safer neighbourhoods they may wish to live in. Importantly, a key recommendation in relation to housing is to increase the move-on period after the grant of refugee status from 7-28 days to 56 days to allow refugees more time to find suitable accommodation and reduce the risk of poverty and homelessness.

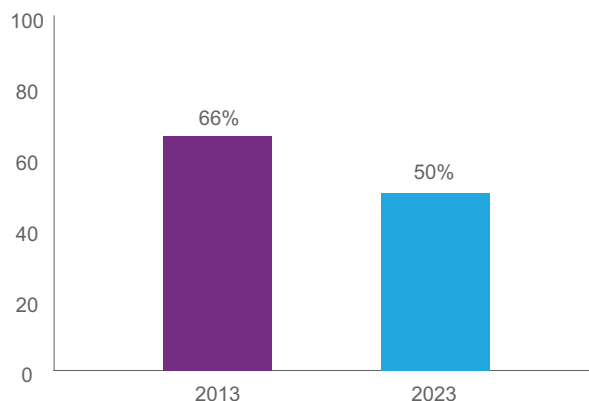
Receipt of benefits



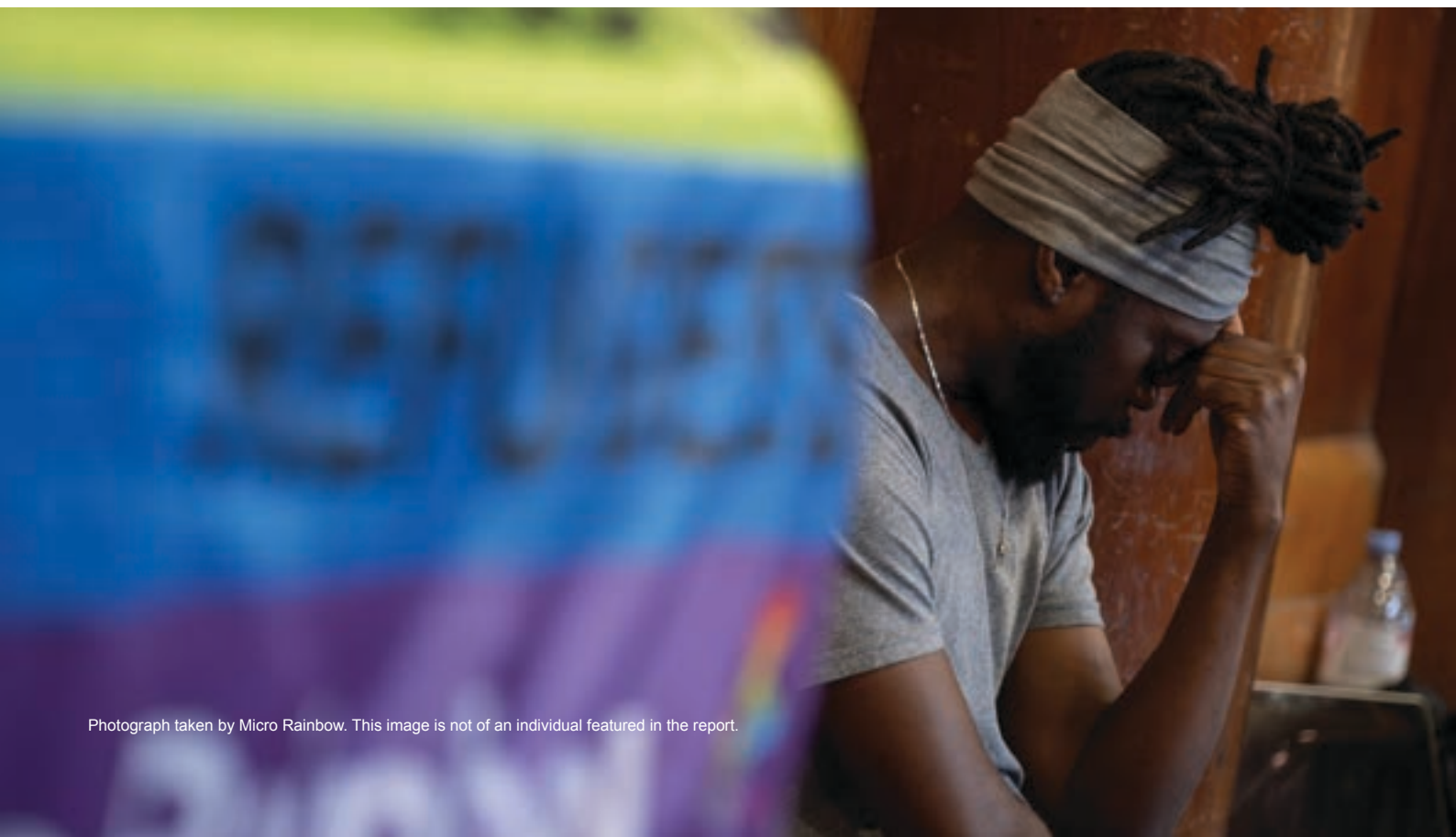
Social integration

Our research shows a 48% decrease in LGBTQI discrimination faced by respondents since our last survey, which is extremely encouraging, and reflective of changing attitudes. Indeed, almost 25% of our respondents felt that their LGBTQI status was an advantage in the UK. Despite this, our study reveals that a considerable proportion of LGBTQI refugee experiences are fraught with challenges and discrimination, often leading to isolation and mental health issues. These individuals face a daunting task of finding acceptance, building support networks, and integrating into a new society, while coping with societal attitudes towards their LGBTQI and refugee identity.

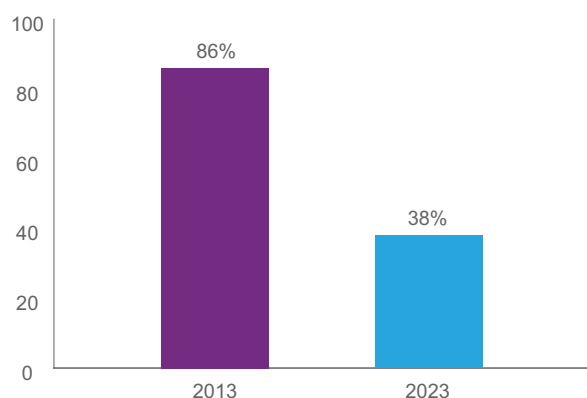
Discrimination due to refugee status



Disappointingly, 50% of our 2023 respondents felt discriminated against because of their refugee status. Although this figure is a 16% improvement compared to 66% of respondents who reported this in 2013, it appears that acceptance levels of the refugee community by the UK public are slow and lacking. There continues to be an intersectionality of discrimination, with refugees facing racial and social barriers and workplace discrimination due to refugee status. As discussed later in the report, the media have a key role to play in changing public attitudes towards refugees, and until they begin to portray refugees in a more positive light, this discrimination figure will likely remain high.



Discrimination due to LGBTQI status



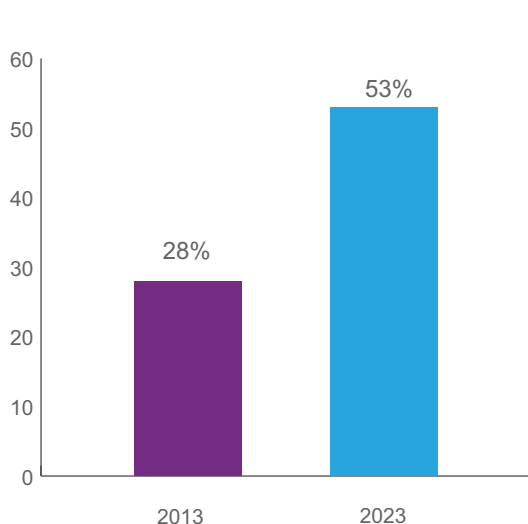
38% of respondents had experienced discrimination based on their LGBTQI status, which shows a significant improvement from the 86% figure in 2013. This may suggest that attitudes towards the LGBTQI community have begun to improve over time and this community is now more accepted by the UK public. Despite the improvement, over a third of this community still faces discrimination and further progress must be made to tackle this. Taking both characteristics together, 28% of those surveyed stated that they felt discriminated against because of both their LGBTQI status and their refugee status, showing that LGBTQI refugees need further support to ensure their acceptance and equal treatment in the UK.

Refugee health

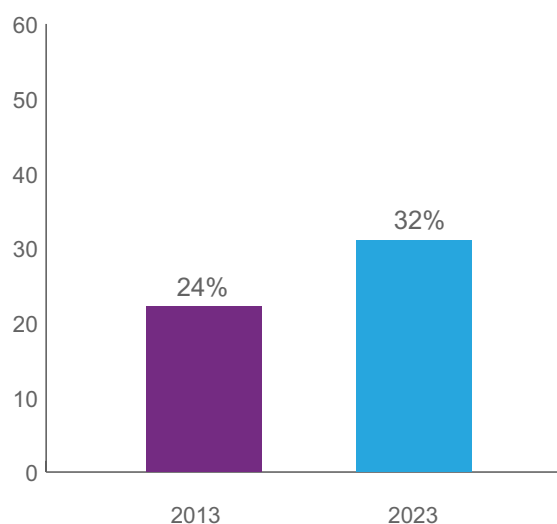
While access to healthcare has increased, refugee health has declined since the last report. Although 92% of respondents confirmed that they are registered with the NHS, 31% of respondents reported having a physical illness or disability compared with 24% in 2013, while 53% indicated mental health needs compared with 28% in 2013². Unfortunately, support is not always available for those in need of help. 33% of those with mental health needs in 2023 did not receive support due to not knowing how to access support, a lack of support for LGBTQI individuals, long waiting lists, high costs, and a fear of discrimination.

These figures are reflective of the experience of the difficulty of accessing care, and especially mental health care, amongst socially and economically disadvantaged groups in the UK generally (Public Health England, 2018). These figures also reflect broader issues in access to healthcare for the LGBTQI community. Stonewall, an LGBTQI charity found that 13% of LGBT people have experienced some form of unequal treatment from healthcare staff because they're LGBT and 23% have witnessed discriminatory or negative remarks against LGBT people by healthcare staff (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018).

Physical and mental health needs – 2013 v 2023



■ 2013 – 28% (mental health needs)
 ■ 2023 – 53% (mental health needs)



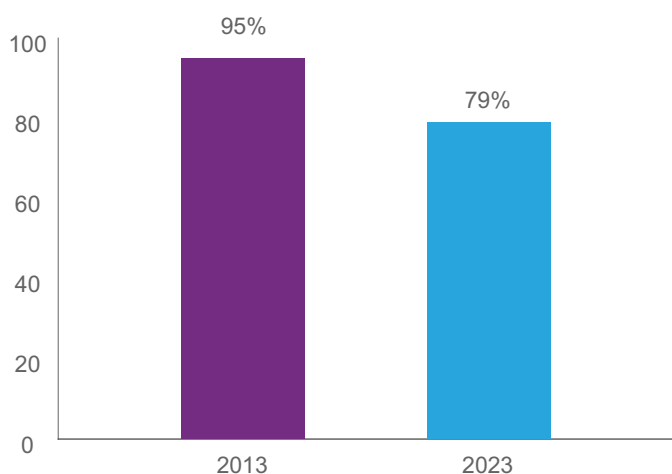
■ 2013 – 24% (physical illness/disability)
 ■ 2023 – 32% (physical illness/disability)

² Although note that this was strictly respondents suffering from depression and post-traumatic disorders and that other mental health conditions were not considered in 2013.

Social inclusion

Isolation has always been a concern for LGBTQI refugees, and this remains a factor with 28% of respondents reporting having no contact with their families. Happily, however, a positive area for our respondents is social inclusion in the UK. 79% of respondents have made new friends in the UK since arriving, 66% of respondents attend LGBTQI meetings/events/clubs and 44% are members of LGBTQI organisations. Of the 59% of respondents who self-described as spiritual or religious, 67% have maintained their religious faith in the UK. In 2013, social inclusion was similarly one of the more positive areas reported as respondents also felt able to make friends in the UK, with 96% of respondents having made new friends and 60% having made friends through LGBTQI organisations. This relatively positive image of integration is however set against the fact that only 21% of respondents reported belonging to groups outside the LGBTQI community. There is clearly work to do to continue to promote wider inclusion.

Have made friends in the UK



Common themes emerged when it came to what respondents did not like about life in the UK, including concerns about the high cost of living, feelings of loneliness, mental health issues, unemployment, a perceived lack of help and support, and experiences of discrimination. Encouragingly, when asked about safety in the UK, a significant majority of respondents (92%) felt safer in the UK than in their home countries.

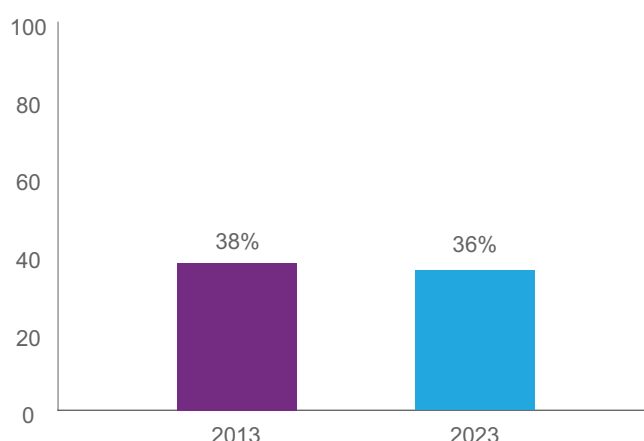
To improve refugee integration, consideration should be given to the recommendations in the following section of the report. Anti-discrimination training and training on creating inclusive environments is important to ensure that LGBTQI and refugee communities are accepted in the UK, and do not feel unsafe or miss out on opportunities due to public attitudes towards them. Providing readily available information on how to access healthcare and facilitating access to required services is also important, so that physical and/or mental health conditions can be treated and do not cause barriers to refugee integration. As social inclusion is generally an element of refugee integration that is working well, maintaining LGBTQI/refugee organisations as well as other social groups will be beneficial for LGBTQI refugees to make friends, develop connections and build their new lives in the UK.

Moving on

The moving on section of the report addresses education, work, and access to banking, which are essential to allow LGBTQI refugees to build an independent life in the UK once granted asylum.

71% of respondents have searched for a job, which indicates that LGBTQI refugees are motivated to take steps to economically engage in the UK. Only 36% of respondents are currently working, which is almost equal to the last report, which saw 38% of respondents in employment in 2013. Of our 2023 respondents who are not currently employed, lack of recognition of qualifications including the need to upskill or reskill was highlighted as the most prominent reason for not being able to secure a job. Similarly, this was also one of the key reasons set out in the 2013 report.

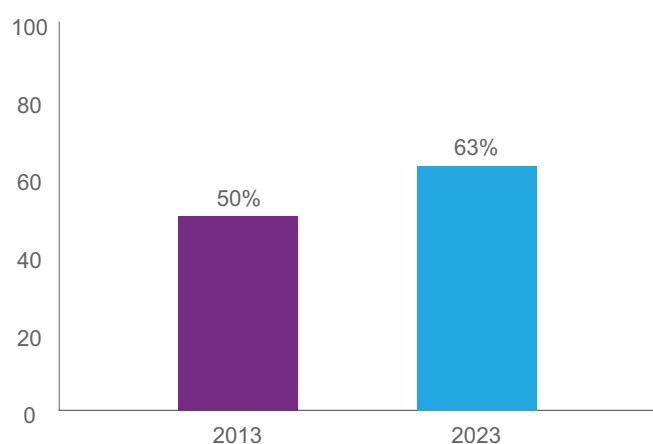
Currently employed



Our respondents are highly skilled, with 54% having higher education qualifications including bachelors, associate and master's degrees. However, of those with higher education qualifications, 63% reported that their qualification was not recognised in the UK, or they were unsure whether it was recognised. This is in comparison to the 50% of respondents reporting in 2013 that their qualifications were not recognised in the UK³. These figures demonstrate that there has been no progress made in the last decade to enable LGBTQI refugees to enter the job market, considering their previous experience and qualifications. We recognise that gaining meaningful employment is not just an issue faced by LGBTQI refugees and is a much wider-scale problem faced by many others in the UK. However, LGBTQI refugees often face additional barriers to accessing the job market.

Our research indicates a need for more to be done to upskill LGBTQI refugees and recognise their overseas qualifications to allow this pool of talent to enter the UK workforce.

Qualification not recognised in the UK



³ Note that this percentage does not include respondents who were not sure whether their qualifications were recognised in the UK and this figure was not provided in 2013.

Our recommendations state that employers should be more flexible in accepting and valuing working experience gained outside the UK and transferable skills possessed by refugees. They also set out the need for increased awareness of the entitlement of refugees to work in the UK and of the kind of identity and educational papers that employers can accept. These recommendations, amongst others, would enable our respondents to more easily enter the workforce and apply for jobs which are suited to their existing qualifications.

In more promising news, there is widespread access to the banking system, with almost all respondents having access to a bank account. Despite anticipated hurdles such as difficulties in some refugees being able to provide a fixed address, in practice this is not generally an issue. In contrast, only a small minority of our respondents have access to loans which can be crucial to starting a small business. With 49% of our respondents interested in starting their own business, this is likely to prove a significant barrier.

Our recommendations consider the above and provide practical suggestions, including asking credit providers to consider that refugee business owners may not be able to provide the same level of credentials and credit history as non-refugee business owners when applying for loans and financial support. The recommendations propose providing training and education programmes including English speaking courses to LGBTQI refugees that focus on upskilling and offering job fairs/seminars so they do not feel thrust into employment.

Recommendations

Our report seeks to understand the additional support required by LGBTQI refugees and how this could be implemented in practice to improve their UK integration journey in the future. The report produces recommendations to guide and drive future change, focusing on recommendations for the following:

1. LGBTQI organisations, refugee community organisations, and to other community voluntary organisations (CVOs);
2. religious organisations;
3. employers;
4. policy makers;
5. local Councils;
6. service providers.

An overview of the key recommendations relating to each of these categories is set out below. Throughout the three core sections of the report to follow (safe housing and living; integration; and moving on), the rationales for these recommendations will be explained in further detail, with reference to the lived experiences of our participants.

Key recommendations

To help address the issues set out in the report, key players in the system could consider a range of changes including:

1. **For LGBTQI organisations, refugee community organisations and other community voluntary organisations:**
 - seek training on how to create inclusive environments, to understand refugee and LGBTQI issues, LGBTQI identities and the intersectionality of being LGBTQI and a refugee;
 - provide readily available training and education programmes including English speaking courses to LGBTQI refugees that focus on upskilling.
 - Offer job fairs/seminars so that refugees do not feel “thrust” into the UK employment market with little support;
 - provide wellbeing and social inclusion activities to help LGBTQI refugees manage past trauma, stress and anxiety and to tackle social isolation;



Photograph taken by Micro Rainbow. This image is not of an individual featured in the report.

- create online groups for those who are fearful of making new friends (due to past experiences) or feel uneasy about being uprooted due to housing issues;
- host seminars with UK employers who commonly offer jobs to refugees. These could also be used to provide clear information about refugee working rights and processes that can be found all in one place;
- promote or provide training on anti-discrimination including within the LGBTQI community (against refugees) and within the refugee community (against those who identify as LGBTQI); and
- ensure the community understands what healthcare is available and facilitate access.

2. For religious organisations

- recognise the important role that they can play, and the support that they can provide, in assisting with the integration of LGBTQI refugees;
- seek training on how to create inclusive environments, including on how to respond to LGBTQI-phobic behaviours within their communities.

3. For employers

- be aware of the entitlement of refugees to work in the UK and of the kind of identity and educational papers that they can accept;
- seek training on how to create inclusive working environments, to understand refugee and LGBTQI issues, LGBTQI identities and the intersectionality of being LGBTQI and a refugee⁴;
- be more flexible in accepting and valuing working experience gained outside the UK and transferable skills; and
- support and collaborate with organisations which seek to place LGBTQI refugees in full time employment or otherwise to provide them with UK work experience.

4. For policy makers

- look to place LGBTQI asylum seekers near bigger cities where they are most likely to have access to specialist LGBTQI services and support and can begin to develop LGBTQI support networks from their arrival in the UK. Additionally, placing them near bigger cities which offer work opportunities will allow them to look for work as asylum seekers (where permitted) or upon the grant of their refugee status, and could assist with the large number of LGBTQI refugees who experienced homelessness post refugee status;
- provide free travel for asylum seekers and subsidised travel for refugees, at least for a period, to facilitate their integration (both day-to-day and long distance);
- allow asylum seekers to work while their asylum case is decided, a process which can take weeks, months, or sometimes years. Their weekly allowance for living expenses is just GBP49.18 a week (and just GBP8.86 for those in catered accommodation). The inability to work of most asylum seekers causes poverty and destitution. If permitted to work while claiming asylum, individuals would already have work when they are granted refugee status which would help to avoid a period of poverty while they change immigration status; and
- increase the moving on period from 7-28 days to 56 days, as suggested by many other organisations. Respondents maintain that when the asylum process ends, they easily find themselves in precarious living conditions and there is a lack of support immediately after gaining refugee status. This time gap puts refugees at risk of poverty and homelessness

5. For Local Councils

- recognise the vulnerabilities of LGBTQI refugees (e.g. homeless trans refugees who are at high risk of violence or abuse), and consider them as a priority group for housing;
- not house LGBTQI refugees in overcrowded accommodation as that increases the risk of violence, abuse and discrimination; and
- be mindful of LGBTQI identities and vulnerabilities when placing LGBTQI refugee in “male only” or “female only” accommodation.

⁴ See [here](#) for the training Micro Rainbow can deliver to empower organisations to work more sensitively and effectively with LGBTQI refugees and asylum seekers.

6. For service providers

- seek training on how to create inclusive environments, to understand refugee and LGBTQI issues, LGBTQI identities and the intersectionality of being LGBTQI and a refugee;
- ensure that staff are aware that refugees have full entitlement to access services and housing;
- ensure staff are fully aware of the types of documents that they can accept from refugees when considering access to services and housing; and
- understand that when considering credit to support a new business run by a refugee, they might not have a credit history or the usual credentials.

Many of the above recommendations remain the same as those contained in the 2013 report. For example, LGBTQI refugees remain below the poverty line, are isolated, and suffer mental health issues, discrimination, and career obstacles. We continue to urge policy makers to allow refugees to work while their asylum applications are pending to help alleviate poverty, especially as processing times have substantially increased (in Q2 2014 87% of applications received an initial

decision within six months compared with 10% in Q2 2022) (Walsh & Sumption, 2023). We must provide LGBTQI refugees with support to obtain adequate healthcare, education and employment. This is crucial to empower them to enhance their quality of life in the UK, access opportunities and contribute to UK society.

Further, we continue to urge employers and financial institutions to educate themselves on the validity of refugee documentation and to give more weight to employment experience gained outside of the UK. *“We need doctors, nurses, pharmacists and vets urgently in the UK but when people with those skills arrive here, it is almost impossible for them to practise the jobs they know how to do”* (Sinclair, 2023). As this report will evidence, many refugees are highly skilled and capable of filling rising skills and labour shortages across the UK economy. However, refugees commonly find their qualifications are not recognised in the UK and overseas work experience is not valued, leaving highly educated individuals struggling to re-enter skilled professions in the UK. We go on to highlight the need for further research into the lived experiences of intersex and trans refugees in the UK and how LGBTQI refugees often fall into homelessness.



Photograph taken by Micro Rainbow. This image is not of an individual featured in the report.

Introduction

Under the 1951 Refugee Convention, people claiming asylum based on their sexual orientation or gender identity may form part of a “*particular social group*”; a ground allowing them to qualify for protection (Home Office, 2016) (Home Office, 2018). In 2022, there were 1,334 applications for asylum made in the UK where sexual orientation formed part of the basis of a claim. These claims made up 2% of the total number of asylum claims in 2022 (Home Office, 2023). The Home Office do not currently provide similar statistics on the number of gender identity based claims.

Asylum claims based on sexual orientation and gender identity, both in the UK and more widely, are often very difficult to determine. Applicants must prove their sexual orientation or gender identity despite many having never disclosed this information before due to the criminalisation of being LGBTQI in their home countries and the persecution LGBTQI people face.

Frequently, LGBTQI asylum seekers are met with suspicion and disbelief towards the credibility of their claims. In the UK, police chief and former immigration minister Chris Philip recently stated that he believed asylum seekers to be using the Refugee Convention “*to claim asylum on the basis of persecution they did not face*” (Quinn, 2023). This same trend is also faced in other jurisdictions, as demonstrated by Dutch LGBT group COC Nederland who previously reported on the preconceived stereotypes by case officers of gay asylum seekers who came from conservative Muslim countries. Their research found that “*if you don’t say that you feel ashamed to be gay, or if you say you didn’t struggle with the contradictions between your sexuality and religion, they are unlikely to believe you*” (The Economist, 2018).

Existing research by Stonewall has shown that individuals who successfully overcome the hurdles of the asylum system and manage to obtain refugee status often go on to face multiple challenges whilst beginning their new lives in the UK. For LGBTQI refugees, “*having to rebuild a life from scratch, with limited access to vital resources including benefits, housing and education, leaves them under immense stress which negatively impacts their mental health and ability to integrate*” (Macmillan, 2021).

Micro Rainbow’s 2013 research report considered the experiences of lesbian and gay refugees following the grant of their refugee status, looking at their journeys towards integration into UK life. The evidence from this research argued that lesbian and gay refugees in the UK lived below the poverty line and were particularly isolated. This was found to negatively impact their mental health and limit their choices, aspirations and opportunities which exacerbated their situation of poverty.

Ten years on, Micro Rainbow seeks to broaden the scope of the previous research which focused solely on gay and lesbian refugees. In this 2023 report, the lived experiences of the wider community of LGBTQI refugees in the UK are examined across three key themes: Safe housing and living; social integration; and moving on. Each of these themes considers a broad range of topics, detailing the key challenges faced by LGBTQI refugees.

Information collected through this research is used to evaluate whether there are any new and emerging issues faced and whether refugees continue to face similar challenges to those reported ten years ago. Whilst the 2013 report concentrated on two cities, London and Manchester, this 2023 report is not limited to specific cities but includes the experiences of LGBTQI refugees from across the UK.

For this research report we consulted with Micro Rainbow service users through an anonymous survey as well as several more detailed one-to-one conversations, which is discussed further in the methodology section of this report. The expansion of the participant base in comparison to the 2013 report sought to provide space to draw out any specific issues faced by certain groups within this community where applicable.

As set out above, the report provides recommendations which are split into a number of different categories. The recommendations consider where there is room for improvement in relation to each of the core themes addressed in the report and aim to drive and guide future change to ensure successful LGBTQI refugee integration.

Methodology

Sample group and research tools

This report examines the lived experiences of LGBTQI refugees in the UK over the course of two different research stages. The report aims to utilise and build on the methodology previously used for the 2013 report, in which 50 lesbian and gay refugees were interviewed by using a structured questionnaire which asked questions on a range of topics.

In 2023, the first stage of the research took a very similar approach and consisted of an anonymous structured questionnaire which 98 LGBTQI refugees responded to. This time, respondents were not limited to just gay and lesbian refugees, instead responses were sought from the wider LGBTQI community to ensure the findings were more representative of LGBTQI refugees as a whole. Respondents were sourced through Micro Rainbow, who shared the questionnaire with many of its beneficiaries. Micro Rainbow beneficiaries were provided a survey code to enter at the beginning of the questionnaire, to ensure that all responses provided were from legitimate LGBTQI refugees. Respondents were also asked to confirm at the beginning of the questionnaire whether they had already obtained refugee status, to ensure that those who were asylum seekers and had not yet obtained leave to remain in the UK were not taken to the remainder of the questions, as the report solely focuses on those who have already obtained refugee status. The questionnaire contained tick box answers for respondents to select from, with additional free text boxes at some questions for respondents to enter further details if they wished to.

The questionnaire consisted of groups of questions which centred around three key themes: safe housing and living, integration and moving on. Within those themes, the questionnaire asked about a range of topics including respondents' background; their journey to the UK; housing; income, expenses and living arrangements; and access to loans, banking and finance. It also asked questions around their personal experiences of discrimination due to their sexual orientation or gender identity; their social lives and hobbies; their religion and beliefs; education and employment.

Ninety-eight LGBTQI refugee participants completed the questionnaire. Ten LGBTQI refugees also participated in the second stage of the research which consisted of more in-depth one-to-one conversations with a volunteer researcher. These conversations delved deeper into the topics covered in the survey and helped researchers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of participants in relation to a range of topics discussed.

The one-to-one conversations took place remotely via Microsoft Teams. All one-to-one conversations took place over a period of three weeks from 12 September 2023 to 5 October 2023 and all were conducted in English.

Survey data was reviewed, sorted and analysed by volunteers in October 2023. Where percentage figures from our survey are included in the report, these figures are rounded to the nearest 1%. This means that when all response percentages to a question are added together, they may not always total exactly 100%. Wherever a question was related to the response to a prior question, the percentage given relates only to the total number of responses given. Following this, the report was drafted throughout the remainder of 2023.



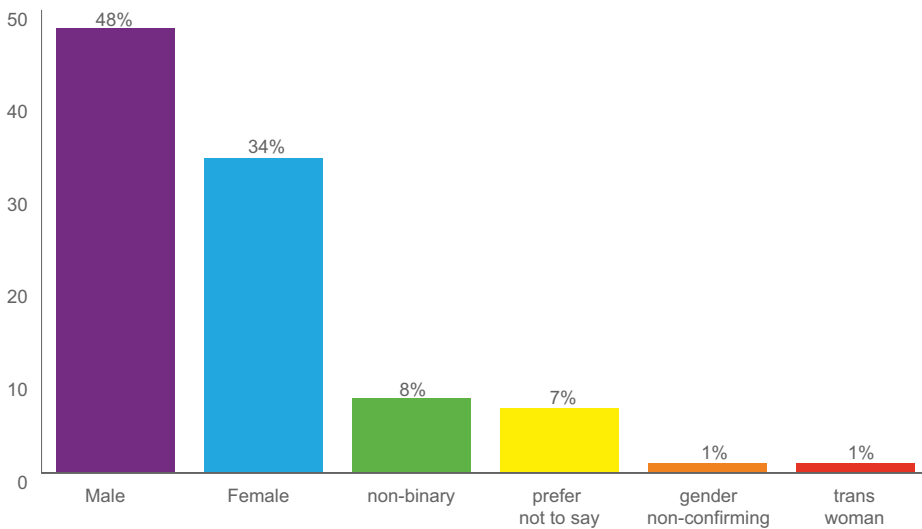
Photograph taken by Micro Rainbow.
This image is not of an individual featured in the report.

Demographics

Identity

Of the 98 survey respondents 48% identified as male, 34% identified as female, 8% identified as nonbinary, 7% preferred not to say, 1% identified as gender non-confirming, and 1% identified as a trans woman (see chart below).

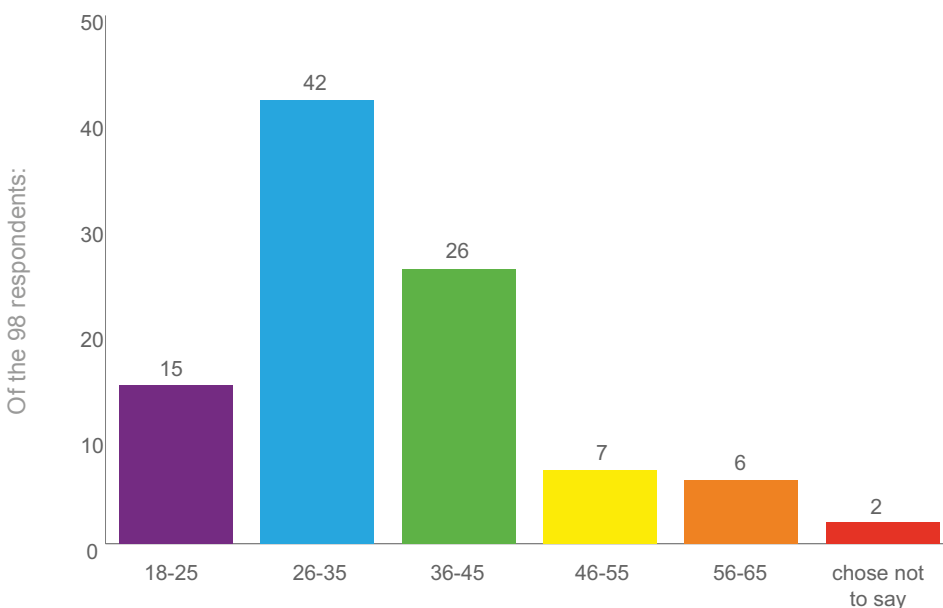
Gender Identity



Age

15% of the 98 respondents were between 18 to 25 years old; 43% were aged 26 to 35; 27% were aged 36 to 45; 7% were aged 46 to 55 and 6% were aged 56 to 65. 2% of the respondents chose not to answer this question.

Age



Ethnicity

The respondents were from a range of ethnic backgrounds. 35% of participants responded that they were Black, 6% responded that they were White and 4% responded that they were White Mixed (i.e. White – Mixed (White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian)). In addition, 23% of respondents stated that they were Asian, 5% responded that they were ethnically Afghan, 13% responded that they were ethnically Arab, 2% responded that they were ethnically Iranian, 3% were ethnically Kurdish, 3% were ethnically Persian and 2% were ethnically Latin. 1% of the respondents indicated that they were of Other Asian ethnicity and 1% responded that they were Black and White.

Nationality

The 98 respondents came from 33 different countries, 14 of which were from the African continent. Afghans formed the largest group of respondents. It is important to note that these national groups are not necessarily representative of the larger population of LGBTQI refugees in the UK.

Nationality

Afghanistan	Gambia	Libya	Trinidad
Algeria	Ghana	Malaysia	Uganda
Azerbaijan	Honduras	Morocco	Ukraine
Bangladesh	Iran	Nigeria	United Kingdom
Cameroon	Iraq	Pakistan	West Bank
Congo	Jamaica	Russia	Zimbabwe
El Salvador	Kazakhstan	Saudi Arabia	
Eritrea	Kenya	South Africa	
Gabon	Lebanon	Syria	

Arrival in the UK

46% of the respondents arrived in the UK between 2019 to 2021. 21% of respondents arrived between 2013 to 2018. 17% arrived between 2002 to 2012 and 9% respondents arrived in the UK in 2022. 6% of the respondents did not provide a response to this question.

81% of respondents travelled to the UK by plane, 13% did so by boat; 1% by train; 2% by ferry; 1% by car or lorry; and 1% by bus. One respondent did not provide a response to this question.

Respondents' profiles

29% of the 98 respondents stated that they have a partner. Of these 29%, 46% stated that their partner was working. Of these 46%, 54% stated that they were being supported by their partner while the other 46% stated that they were not. 54% of respondents answered that their partners were not working.

20% of the respondents answered that they had children. Of these 20%, 55% answered that they have their children in the UK with them, while 45% answered that their children are in their home countries. Of the 20% of participants with children, 20% said that they had young adult children who were supporting them while 80% said that they did not have young adult children who were supporting them. The question posed to the respondents asked whether they had young adult children who were supporting them, without further or follow up questions on this subject. As a result, respondents may have answered "no" because they do not have young adult children or because they have young adult children, but they are not being supported by them. The other 80% of participants answered that they did not have children.

34% respondents said that they either support parents and siblings in their home countries; a partner, their own children and/ or family living in the UK.

“ Sometimes I have to sacrifice money to send to them because they are poor and can sometimes go days without eating due to lack of money.”

— Female refugee from Africa.

“ My ill grandma I save some GBP10 and send her for support as she is 88 [years old] and no support”

— Female refugee from Africa.

Most of the respondents first arrived in London when they arrived in the UK. After London, the other UK cities with the highest proportion of LGBTQI arrivals were Birmingham; Coventry; Oxford and Dover.

52% of respondents are still living in the city they initially moved to after arriving in the UK. Their reasons for doing so included that they like the city; have family or friends nearby; found suitable housing; found a job; or have a partner. Alternatively, some felt unsafe to move or that they couldn't afford to. 48% participants no longer live in the city they were initially placed in upon arriving in the UK. Their reasons for leaving included: they found housing elsewhere; they have family or friends living elsewhere or they were moved by the Home Office.

As a result of some respondents moving, the most common current locations of the respondents are as follows:

The majority still live in London, followed by Birmingham, Glasgow and Leeds. The remaining of respondents reside in other UK cities.

Respondents' current locations



- London
- Birmingham
- Glasgow
- Leeds
- Other UK cities

Safe housing and living

Safe housing

As the largest city in the UK, London is home to many of our survey respondents. It's also the city where 53% of respondents began their journey when they arrived in the UK.

Just over half of the survey respondents (52%) still call the city in which they arrived in the UK their home. For many of our respondents this was London, with 39% of all respondents remaining there after having arrived there when they first came to the UK, and another 4% moving there after their arrival in the UK. Other common areas where many of our respondents arrived in the UK include Coventry, Birmingham, Dover and Oxford.

Respondents attributed staying in their original city of arrival to a number of reasons, including because they like the city, have found suitable housing, or have friends, family or a partner living nearby. This aligns with our findings in 2013, in which respondents attributed staying in their original location to reasons such as establishing a network of friends or finding a partner. Conversely, a smaller number of our 2023 respondents who remain in their city of arrival said that this was due to negative reasons such as not knowing anyone outside of their arrival city, fear of the unknown or not being able to afford to move. A middle-aged female from Africa who has remained in London feels like she has no other options. She has stayed in London because she has friends and family nearby but also because she can't afford the cost of moving elsewhere.

A sense of safety is one of the highest priorities for refugees. This can be found from a variety of factors including social inclusion, public transportation and, of course, housing. 22% of refugees stayed in smaller towns and cities. These respondents were in their early to mid-twenties and all attributed to staying to feeling safe and importantly having found housing that they were happy in.

48% of respondents have moved location since arriving in the UK, many from very small towns or cities. Significantly fewer respondents moved away from larger cities such as London. 75% of respondents who indicated that they had moved attributed moving location due to finding housing, a job or having family and friends in another area. One male from Asia in his early twenties left a smaller city to find housing in Birmingham, however, he is currently living in a hotel as he has received no support to find any permanent housing. 5% of respondents were rehomed by the government due to domestic abuse issues, including one female in her sixties. One male respondent in his thirties from Asia relocated from his original city *"because my whole family lives in and around (city), as I'm gay and after coming out it was hard for me to live around my family because they didn't want to see me"*.

Finding housing

Arguably the main housing issue faced by refugees is the short time frame in which they must find housing after the grant of their refugee status. Under Home Office policy, section 95 support is granted to asylum seekers whilst they await a decision on their applications. This means that in addition to a small weekly financial allowance, asylum accommodation can be provided on a no choice basis by the Home Office. However, once an individual is granted refugee status, the section 95 support will cease after a period of 7-28 days, known as the 'move-on period'. This means that those who were placed in asylum accommodation only have a very short period of time to find alternative accommodation.

During a one-to-one conversation, Chris, a gay man from Asia, told us of struggles he faced with finding accommodation within the move-on period. Chris had been staying in a guest house whilst his asylum claim was pending. After his refugee status was granted, he had approached his local Council for assistance but had been told they could not find him any immediate housing. Chris explained that he was not allowed to stay in the guest house whilst he found somewhere to live, stating *"If someone (is) not leaving the guest house within...28 days they lock the door. You know they kick you out. They don't care where you go. You have to leave the guest (house) because you got refugee status. You have it, you have to leave this place. You have to go to (the) Council."* Although local Councils are obliged to provide emergency housing to families who have children, adults without children may not qualify for emergency housing. With the help of the Refugee Council, Chris was ultimately provided with accommodation however many others are not this fortunate and are often left homeless and unsupported.

Similarly, Gabriel, a gay trans man from Africa told us he was unable to find housing within the 28 days he was given by the Home Office. Gabriel was living in a town outside of London but was told by the Council that he had not lived there long enough to be allowed to join the housing register. Gabriel was forced to leave his asylum accommodation and move into a YMCA hostel two hours away by train as he had no other option.

Risk of homelessness

In the 2013 report, we demonstrated that there is a lack of support for refugees immediately after gaining refugee status and that respondents commonly found themselves in precarious living conditions and at risk of poverty. We recommended that policy makers should commit to and engage in conversations with civil society organisations to understand how to change support systems for refugees and promote the best start in their new life in the UK. Unfortunately, this recommendation continues to remain necessary a decade later as the inadequate move-on period increases the risk of poverty and homelessness for many refugees and hinders their ability to start their new life.

For a number of years, charities such as the British Red Cross have called on the government to extend the move-on period to 56 days. Refugees are issued with a 'notice to quit' by their accommodation provider, setting out when they must leave their asylum accommodation. This notice must give them a minimum of 7 days before the end of the 28 day move-on period to leave the accommodation. Although previously refugees were usually given the full 28 days to move on, a new approach adopted in August 2023 means that increasing numbers of refugees are now given only 7 days to leave their accommodation.

In August 2023 the Guardian reported on the risks caused by the reduced time period, with Zoe Dexter from the Helen Bamber Foundation warning that *"Seven days is simply untenable and puts thousands of survivors of trafficking and refugees at increased risk of homelessness, destitution and exploitation as they face eviction with nowhere to go"* (Taylor, 2023). In a recent article by the British Red Cross, it was estimated that over 50,000 refugees may become homeless by the end of 2023, with their Director for Refugee Support stating that *"Once people get refugee status, they need more time, not less, to find housing, work or benefits. It takes at least 35 days to start getting Universal Credit and local authorities need at least 56 days to help them find accommodation"* (British Red Cross, 2023).

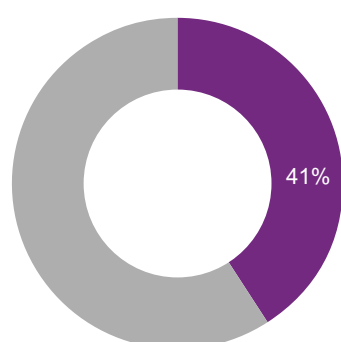
A further issue in relation to the new approach is that the move-on period now begins from when an individual is notified that their application has been successful, rather than once they receive their Biometric Residence Permit (BRP), which is commonly received between 7-10 days after an individual is notified of their successful asylum claim (British Red Cross, 2023). Without this document, refugees cannot apply for Universal Credit, gain employment, open bank accounts or rent properties which further prohibits them from finding alternative accommodation within the limited time frame and creates further barriers to successful integration.

Whilst they were asylum seekers, 41% of our respondents had experienced homelessness. Many were also struggling to afford basic necessities, as the small financial allowance provided under their section 95 support was not sufficient. David, a trans man from the Middle East told us that *"We did not even have money to buy clothes. We had to wait three months for the GBP8.00 to arrive and when we had it we had to like save up GBP8.00 every week so we can buy a jacket with it"*.

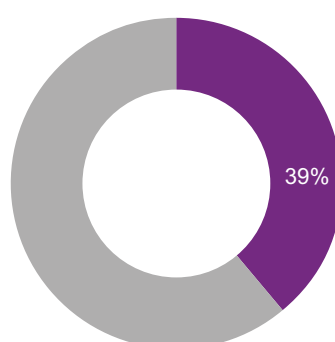
Similarly, since being granted refugee status, 39% of respondents have experienced homelessness. One of our respondents, a female from Europe, reported being currently homeless and staying in a homeless shelter. David's situation did not immediately improve after the grant of his refugee status either. He told us that *"The Council did not find me...housing, did not have any work. I had to be homeless and stay at the lobby for, I think three, two or three months without any room"*.

Frankie, a nonbinary person from Asia told us that despite the difficulties refugees face in finding accommodation in a short period of time, *"They say you made yourself homeless"*. The British Red Cross recently emphasised the severity of the issue of homelessness among refugees, setting out that *"In parts of Greater Manchester, homelessness for single men has almost become a guaranteed part of getting refugee status"* (British Red Cross, 2023).

Homelessness



41% of respondents experienced homelessness as asylum seekers



39% of respondents have experienced homelessness as refugees

In addition to the housing challenges commonly faced by refugees, existing research demonstrates how LGBTQI individuals struggle disproportionately compared to others in relation to certain housing issues in the UK, including homelessness. In a 2018 report by World Habitat, it was stated that *“in many cases this is linked to a mix of personal experiences of homo/bi/ transphobia, wider institutional failures and a lack of understanding of LGBTQ+ needs”* (World Habitat, 2018).

Similar findings were set out in a 2021 report by Albert Kennedy Trust (AKT) in their ‘LGBTQ+ youth homelessness report’. AKT found that *“only 35 per cent of LGBTQ+ young people who have accessed a service whilst homeless recall being asked by service providers to provide information about their gender identity and sexual orientation. Just one third (33 per cent) felt safe to disclose this information”* (Bhandal & Horwood, 2021). The needs of LGBTQI individuals, particularly those who are also refugees, requires more consideration to combat the housing challenges they face, but a safe environment for them to disclose these needs must first be created.

Income and living expenses

49% of our survey respondents attribute their source of income solely to Universal Credit, with an additional 16% naming Universal Credit as part of their income, often coupled with savings, work or money from friends (or a combination of these things). In total, 65% of respondents reported that Universal Credit was one of their income sources. Comparatively, in 2013, 60% of respondents were receiving some form of benefits, meaning there has been a 5% increase in respondents relying on state support over the last decade. 24% of the 2023 respondents attribute their income solely to work and 2% solely to assistance from friends. The majority of respondents listed a combination of sources of income as illustrated above. By way of further example, 3% of respondents stated that their sources of income are a combination of work and additional financial support which is not Universal Credit, such as money from a partner, friends or a student loan. In 2013, 90% of respondents relied on their wages or benefits and did not have any other sources of income, but 6% of respondents were being supported by their partners who helped them to pay bills.

Despite being granted refugee status and gaining the right to work legally in the UK, 71% of respondents stated that they do not currently have enough money to cover their cost of living. Of these respondents, 43% have a monthly spend of GBP300 or less (excluding rent). Key issues reported were that respondents were struggling to afford food, rent, transport, general toiletries and

medical care. 6% of respondents stated that they are struggling to afford a gender affirming procedure or hormone treatment. Similarly in 2013, 76% of respondents stated that they did not have enough money to cover their living costs and a gay man from Africa told us that sometimes he was forced to go without food. Of the 24% of respondents in 2013 that did have enough money to cover their living costs, 25% of them stated that they ‘just get by’ and that there were many things which they must renounce.

20% of our respondents have children, with just over half of the respondents’ children living with them in the UK. The remaining respondents’ children are still living in their home country. As well as supporting their children, there is often a feeling of obligation for some refugees to be financially supporting other family members in their home countries, which can deplete already tight budgets. 30% of respondents are supporting family members back home, primarily in the form of financial support by sending them money when they are able to.

69% of respondents are currently paying their own rent. The remaining respondents do not currently pay for their own rent. Of these, most respondents contribute towards living expenses such as utility bills and food, or tasks such as housework or taking children to school whilst going to college.

Our 2013 research concluded that the risk of destitution for lesbian and gay refugees was very high and recommended that support organisations must become more aware of the needs of this particular group, as well as accessing resources that would enable them to offer material support to LGBTQI refugees. Our 2023 statistics show there has been almost no improvement in the financial situation of LGBTQI refugees in the last decade, with just under three quarters of our respondents struggling with everyday living costs. Based on this, we feel that we must continue to support LGBTQI refugees more in the areas to ensure they can support themselves and prevent them falling into poverty and destitution.

Our 2023 recommendations seek to be more specific in setting out the initiatives that organisations could implement to assist LGBTQI refugees further, including providing readily available training and education programmes including English speaking courses that focus on upskilling. We also recommend hosting seminars with UK employers who commonly offer jobs to refugees.

Not only will this help to inform LGBTQI refugees of their options and educational requirements for various careers, but these events could also be used to provide clear information to employers about refugee working rights and processes that can be found all in one place.

Living arrangements

Just over half of respondents like their current living arrangement. This is due to the housing being close or easily accessible to the city centre, safety and being close to family and friends. A common theme for refugees in the UK is the feeling of safety. Respondents noted they feel safe because of friendly local LGBTQI communities. Another theme was the sense of ownership, as their home felt like it was *“their space”*, and they were comfortable in the area. Erica, a lesbian woman from Africa says: *“I was in a 2 bedroom with my kids and I can’t complain where the accommodation ‘cause it was well equipped and any problems I would call and they would be right there”*.

However, 43% of respondents have concerns about where they live. Some respondents, don’t feel safe in the area or, occasionally, in their own home. Bianca, a lesbian from Africa says there have been people trying *“to fight me or trying to provoke me”* in her accommodation. One respondent said he would rather live with other LGBTQI housemates. Chris, a gay man from Asia shared his experiences of being bullied by others in shared accommodation and his gender questioned, due to the way he dressed. Chris says: *“We can’t change the people mentality level, you know, (of) some people in this country. In my people, all our people are very homophobic in my country. But here, not all of them”*.

There are instances where individuals are being placed in inappropriate housing. One of our respondents, a female from Asia, reported being placed in an all-male shared house where she is currently experiencing issues with being disturbed by the men. She informed us that the Council has ignored her concerns and her experience in this housing situation has become so bad that she stated, *“two weeks ago I took overdose medication only for men disturbing me”*. As discussed earlier in this section, Gabriel, a gay trans man from Africa had to reside in a YMCA hostel as the local Council refused to add him to the housing register. Gabriel was placed by hostel staff in a room which he shared with a trans woman. Gabriel expressed that he wished he had been given a choice of who he would like to share a room with, telling us *“I felt uncomfortable even dress or change around her because you are still very biologically how we were born”*.

43% of those respondents who have concerns about where they live have not yet tried to move. However, of the other 57% of respondents who have tried to move, many experienced rejections due to lack of affordability, failing credit checks, lack of availability, landlords requiring too much money, or not accepting refugees. They were not offered support from the government and did not feel that they were considered a priority for the local Council.

To combat the key living arrangement issues set out above, we have provided a number of recommendations primarily aimed at local Councils. The recommendations stated that local Councils must:

- Recognise the vulnerabilities of LGBTQI refugees (e.g. homeless trans refugees who are at high risk of violence or abuse), and consider them as a priority group for housing;
- Not house LGBTQI refugees in overcrowded accommodation as that increases the risk of violence, abuse and discrimination; and
- Be mindful of LGBTQI identities and vulnerabilities when placing LGBTQI refugee in “male only” or “female only” accommodation.

Additionally, our recommendations set out that policy makers should look to place LGBTQI asylum seekers near bigger cities where they are most likely to have access to specialist LGBTQI services and support and can begin to develop LGBTQI support networks from their arrival in the UK. Furthermore, placing them near bigger cities which offer work opportunities will allow them to look for work as asylum seekers (where permitted) or upon the grant of their refugee status, and could assist with the large number of participants who experienced homelessness post receiving refugee status.



Photograph taken by Micro Rainbow.
This image is not of an individual featured in the report.

Transportation and access to technology

82% of respondents rely on some form of public transport, such as buses, the underground, trains or taxis. They use public transport for their day-to-day activities such as going to work, shopping, accessing the city centre, visiting friends or family, education and appointments. Of those relying on public transport, only 39% of respondents can afford the public transport they use, but 60% of respondents either struggle at times to afford it or simply cannot afford it. They struggle because of the fare zone pricing in London or, if there is no direct bus, train travel is often an expensive alternative. Similarly in 2013, respondents (particularly those living in London) reported experiencing limited mobility as they struggled to afford travel costs such as paying for the underground or bus fares on a regular basis, which had an impact on their everyday lives including their jobs and the ability to socialise with others. The situation is particularly acute for respondents with physical disabilities. Although some may be able to access a disabled person's travel card, others face barriers in applying and accessing these travel cards.

To prevent the knock-on financial impacts that expensive travel causes to asylum seekers and refugees day-to-day lives, we recommend that policy makers consider extending schemes that provide free travel for asylum seekers and subsidised

travel for refugees, at least for a period to facilitate their integration (both day-to-day and long distance). As set out above, public transport is key to ensuring that these communities can travel to work and build social connections in the UK, yet many are struggling to pay for this and their integration may be hindered as a result.

93% of respondents have a mobile phone, whether that be through purchasing it themselves, or having one provided to them. Only a small handful of respondents said they don't use a mobile phone with one respondent saying their mobile phone had been stolen. Half of respondents who own a mobile phone say they use it to access the internet.

45% of respondents own a computer. 75% of respondents who have a computer received the computer as a gift from a support organisation. This is a similar figure to the 50% of respondents in 2013 who owned a computer. In 2023, those who own their own computer reported using it for work, studying and day-to-day activities, such as accessing the internet, emails or video calls with family and friends. For people who don't have their own laptop or computer, they rely on mobile phones, public Wi-Fi, libraries and coffee shops to access the internet. Accessing the internet is a vital step in searching for employment and can hinder their ability to find a job and increase their income.



Safe housing: Bianca's story

One of our respondents, Bianca, spoke to our research team about her experience of housing in the UK, both while seeking asylum and after being granted refugee status.

Bianca is a lesbian from Africa who was granted refugee status in 2022. Before obtaining refugee status in June of that year, Bianca was moved around to a few different accommodations and had a mixture of positive and negative experiences of her accommodation. She was initially located in the East of England, where the British Red Cross introduced her to an LGBTQI group and she had the opportunity to make friends, some of whom she is still in contact with.

After being housed in the East of England initially, Bianca was moved to a city in the Midlands, and then to another smaller city in the Midlands, and finally to another larger city in the Midlands, where she still currently lives. Bianca found her time in the smaller city particularly stressful and uncomfortable because she was housed in a hostel with 15 other people from very different backgrounds. She says it was, *“really horrible as well because for sure I couldn't even sit down and eat something from the kitchen”*. Once she was moved to her current location, Bianca began to feel settled and described her new asylum accommodation as ‘really a lovely house’.

However, after being granted refugee status, Bianca was given 28 days to leave the accommodation. The difficulties caused by this short move-on period have been discussed earlier in the report and Bianca faced similar challenges to many of our other respondents. As Bianca was unable to find accommodation in this short time frame, she was moved into temporary accommodation in the East of England, where she still currently resides. She has found it very difficult to settle into her new accommodation and still doesn't feel like she has peace of mind there. Bianca is a proud African woman but has been upset by reactions from other residents to her cooking African food in the shared kitchen, feeling that there may have been undertones of racism in their comments. Other residents keep asking her why she is quiet and why she doesn't talk to people. She has also been confronted by other residents trying to fight her or provoke her to become angry.

Bianca is the only LGBTQI person in her temporary accommodation and her treatment by others has led to her wanting to “cover up” her identity as she feels that “when I open up, they can be more horrible than the way they are seeing me here”. One of the other issues with living in temporary accommodation is the fear of being moved to a new location and how this will impact her if she manages to find a permanent job.

Bianca explained that she would like nothing more than to leave temporary accommodation and rent on her own but she doesn't feel like she can. Any available accommodation is too expensive for her. Bianca is currently trying to find work in the hope that she will be able to rent a flat on her own in the future. Back in Africa she trained as a social worker and obtained a qualification. Bianca has a passion for working with children and the elderly, however she has faced issues with finding employment in the UK because the training she undertook in Africa does not match the training required in the UK. She will need to carry out further studies to obtain a social worker role in the UK, which she is considering beginning in 2024.

Bianca raised a general issue with shared housing in that there are often a large mix of people who are placed together, and it can be difficult to live harmoniously with them. Bianca has high ambitions and would like to become accomplished in the UK, but others surrounding her in her housing can often make this feel difficult, for example by playing loud music throughout the night, affecting her sleep.

Despite experiencing challenges, Bianca is making positive steps in her integration journey through looking for work, thinking about further education and keeping in touch on social media with her friends she met when she first arrived in the UK. She is also joining local social activities with others from different cultures including a women's group, who attend activities together.



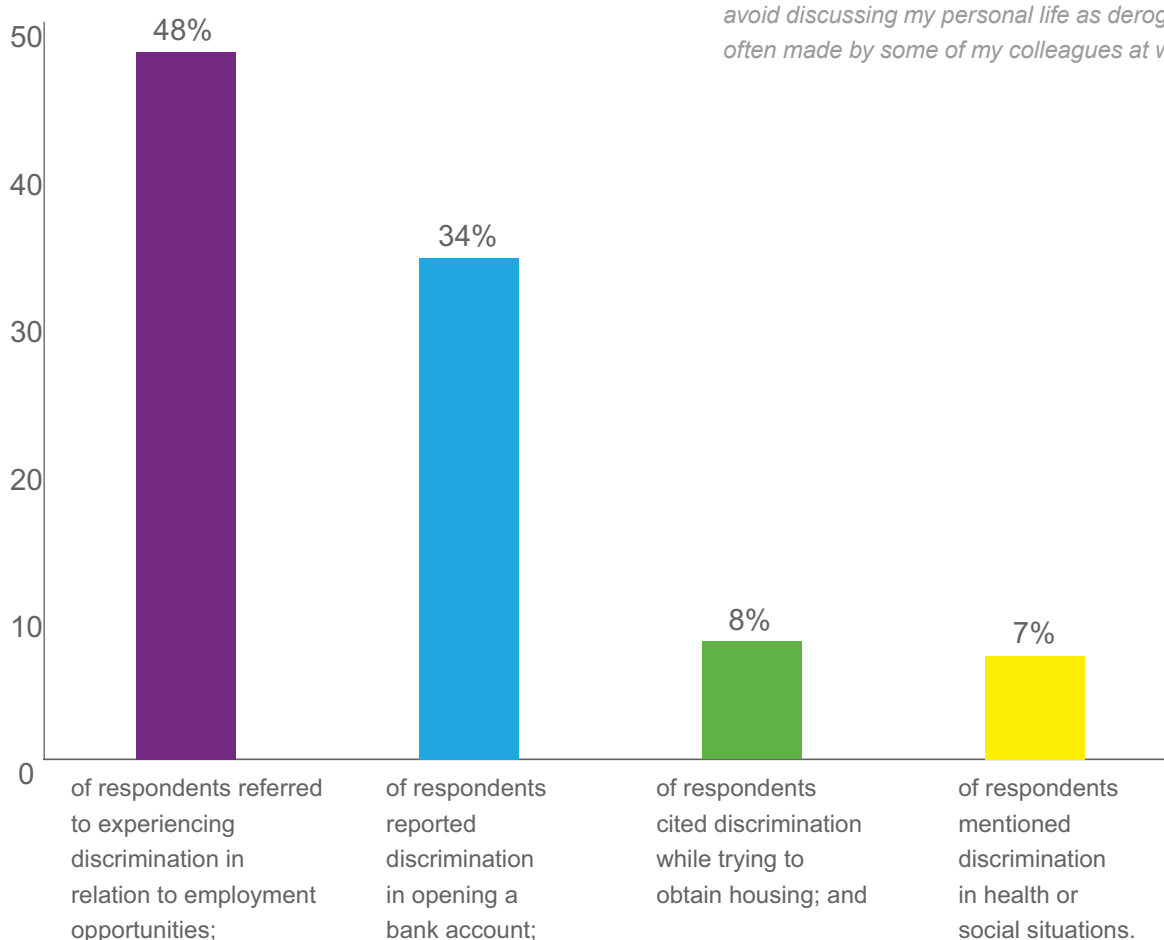
Photograph taken by Micro Rainbow. This image is not of an individual featured in the report.

Integration

Discrimination and exploitation

A study conducted by Attia et al in 2022 looked at the pre- and post-migration experiences of LGBTQI asylum-seeking individuals. The research highlighted that the trauma and discrimination faced by LGBTQI individuals in their home countries can profoundly affect their efforts to establish stable lives in a new host country. These challenges can create significant barriers to their resettlement and integration into a new society. (Attia, Das, Tang, Li, & Qiu, 2022)

In addition to the trauma and discrimination faced in their home countries, LGBTQI refugees face a unique set of challenges when seeking refuge in the United Kingdom, which this research seeks to better understand. This can include struggles related to 'coming out', social isolation, discrimination and exploitation from various communities, difficulties in building networks, and the subsequent negative impacts on their mental health. Our survey respondents' stories represent a range of experiences, but common themes and challenges have emerged throughout.



Discrimination based on LGBTQI status

When survey respondents were asked if they had ever felt discriminated against or treated less favourably in the UK due to their LGBTQI status, 38% of respondents responded affirmatively. Among those who experienced discrimination, there were reports of varying forms of harassment and homophobia, with some respondents even experiencing violence. In contrast, in 2013 a much higher percentage of respondents (86%) reported facing discrimination in the UK due to their sexual orientation. Our research shows a 48% decrease in LGBTQI discrimination faced by respondents over the last decade, suggesting the wider UK population is becoming increasingly accepting of the LGBTQI community. This is extremely encouraging, but there remains progress to be made for the LGBTQI community more generally, with over a third of respondents continuing to face discrimination due to their LGBTQI status. One respondent, a female from Europe, stated that she was refused sponsorship under a sponsorship scheme due to her potential sponsor's attitudes towards LGBTQI people. Another respondent, a non-binary person from Africa, stated that *"I'm married and living with my partner. People often assume my partner is male and will often reference to my 'husband". I often avoid discussing my personal life as derogatory comments are often made by some of my colleagues at work."*

During the one-to-one conversations with volunteers, participants also spoke openly about discrimination they had faced due to their LGBTQI status.

Chris, a gay man from Asia, tells us that he has had negative experiences both within the LGBTQI and Muslim communities in the UK, making it challenging to find acceptance.

Gabriel, a gay trans man from Africa, also opened up to us about the isolation resulting from sexual orientation discrimination within his African community in the UK.

Frankie, a non binary person from Asia, highlights a pervasive issue of discrimination in shelters and precarious situations, in which LGBTQI individuals can feel particularly isolated.

David, a trans man from the Middle East, tells us of his experience in hostels, which reflects the struggle for respect and recognition within these environments.

Discrimination based on refugee status

When asked about discrimination based on refugee status, 50% of respondents of our survey reported feeling discriminated against or treated less favourably, compared to 66% of respondents in 2013. Although positive that there has been a 15% reduction in the number of respondents experiencing refugee status discrimination, it is disappointing that this reduction is not greater given the 10-year period that has elapsed.

During the one-to-one conversations, participants shared further details about their experiences of discrimination based on their refugee status.

Imran, a gay man from Africa, raised concerns about the vulnerability experienced by LGBTQI refugees and highlights that the refugee status magnifies the challenges of integration.

Hamish, a gay man from Africa, emphasised the intersectionality of the discrimination he faced, with him facing racial and social barriers to integration and employment and workplace discrimination due to his refugee status. These challenges combined, add to the difficulties of fitting into a new environment.

Perceived advantages based on LGBTQI and refugee status

When respondents were asked if they had ever felt that they had an advantage because of their LGBTQI status in the UK, 23% of them answered affirmatively. These advantages included being able to live without fear, safely and freely unlike in their home countries, being granted asylum based on the grounds of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and having support from LGBTQI organisations. In 2013, an almost equal number of respondents (24%) believed there were advantages because of their LGBTQI status. This included a lesbian respondent from Africa finding housing through a lesbian housing cooperative and a gay man from Asia stating his chances of working in the fashion industry were better because “they like gay people, we have sense of fashion”.

In terms of advantages due to their refugee status in the UK, 24% of respondents reported experiencing advantages including educational, safety, work and financial advantages. Similarly in 2013, 20% of respondents reported perceived advantages including their refugee status allowing them to have a normal life and enjoy freedom in the UK. However notably, many of the advantages mentioned are not advantages compared with the wider UK population, but advantages of being granted refugee status in the UK, which have led to improvements in respondents’ lives compared with their circumstances in their home countries.

In conclusion, our survey reveals that a considerable proportion of LGBTQI refugee experiences are fraught with challenges and discrimination from various communities, often leading to isolation and mental health issues. These individuals face a daunting task of finding acceptance, building support networks, and integrating into a new society while coping with the challenges associated with their LGBTQI status.

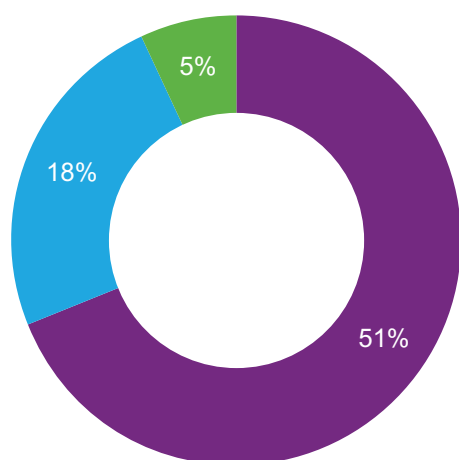
These unique challenges need to be addressed with sensitivity and empathy, providing LGBTQI refugees with the support they require to lead safe, fulfilling lives in the UK. This includes improved support networks, protection from discrimination and better integration opportunities. In particular, our recommendations for employers and service providers include seeking training on how to create inclusive environments, to understand refugee and LGBTQI issues, identities and the intersectionality of being LGBTQI and a refugee. Similarly, we recommend that LGBTQI, refugee and other community voluntary organisations should promote or provide training on anti-discrimination including within the LGBTQI community (against refugees) and within the refugee community (against those who identify as LGBTQI). Finally, we believe that religious organisations would also benefit from seeking training as described above, including on how to challenge LGBTQI-phobic behaviours within their communities.

Perceived quality of life in the UK

Our survey found that respondents had varying opinions about their life in the UK.

51% of respondents appreciated the sense of “freedom” they found in the UK, while around 18% of respondents valued the feeling of being “safe”. A further 5% appreciated the opportunities available to them in the UK. When asked about safety in the UK, a significant majority of 91% of respondents responded that they felt safer in the UK than in their home countries, while just three respondents said that they did not feel safer in the UK, expressing concerns that included feelings of loneliness, repeated hospitalisation, and the potential for racism. In 2013, 100% of respondents perceived life in the UK, to be better than in their home countries, a view that has been upheld ten years on, as demonstrated above. In 2013, respondents expressed the importance of the same two factors of ‘safety’ and ‘freedom’, referring to being able to do things safely like living with a partner which would not be possible in their home country.

What do you like about your life in the UK? (Top three responses)



- Freedom
- Safety
- Opportunities

During our one-to-one conversations, Amir, a gay man from Asia, highlighted the importance of LGBTQI support networks and social inclusion groups, and that although organisations like Micro Rainbow provide dedicated assistance, additional support is required for many other people. Amir also told us that *“In [my country of origin] you are just worried about being alive. Here I feel safe, but the worries are different. They are housing, cost of living, the economy, it makes it so difficult to establish a new life and a way of living”*.

Frankie, a non binary person from Asia, expressed a fear of being their true self in the UK, This fear was most pronounced when they were in vulnerable situations, such as seeking assistance from charities. They also reported feeling fear when attending night shelters with other communities, as they were concerned that these environments might not be supportive of LGBTQI people. This fear stemmed from concerns about discrimination or harassment in these settings.

Common themes emerged when it came to what respondents did not like about life in the UK, including concerns about the high cost of living, feelings of loneliness, mental health issues, unemployment, a perceived lack of help and support, and experiences of discrimination. Similarly, respondents expressed a desire for changes in their lives, including better work and education opportunities, improved housing support, more robust overall support, a better understanding of people and their cultures, addressing the cost of living, and wanting to connect with friends and family.

All in all, the mixed opinions regarding the quality of life in the UK reveal the diverse experiences of these individuals. While some experience the sense of freedom and safety, others grapple with loneliness, mental health issues, and discrimination. The desire for change and the call for better work, education, housing support, and more robust overall assistance highlight areas where improvements can be made to enhance the quality of life for LGBTQI refugees.

Healthcare challenges

Refugees commonly face increased health risks whilst they are on the move and in host countries and they can be more susceptible to certain health conditions (Doctors of the World, 2020). International humanitarian organisation Doctors of the World (DOTW), who provide medical care and support to vulnerable and marginalised communities such as refugees and displaced persons in over 80 countries, identified that the trend towards increased health risks to refugees and the prevalence of certain conditions is also present in the UK. A report by DOTW set out that in the UK refugees experience “poor access to health services, higher prevalence of certain conditions and worse health outcomes than the general population” (Doctors of the World, 2020).

NHS guidance states that anyone in the UK can register with a GP surgery to access NHS services. It’s free to register and you do not need proof of address or immigration status, ID or an NHS number (NHS, 2023). Despite this, refugees encounter various obstacles when attempting to access healthcare, including bureaucratic challenges, distrust resulting from past experiences, limited understanding of healthcare systems and cultural or language disparities. Additionally, refugees may encounter challenges in providing requested identification or completing pre-registration forms, which can act as barriers to seeking healthcare services.

Our survey examined healthcare registration and satisfaction with NHS services among respondents. Out of the respondents, 86% confirmed they were registered with the NHS, 7% of participants did not respond to the question, 3% were unsure, and only 3% were not registered. Encouragingly, despite the various obstacles set out above, the majority of respondents have been able to complete the first step in accessing healthcare by registering with the NHS. In terms of the quality of service, 45% of respondents reported good service, 17% reported somewhat good service, 13% reported neither good nor bad service, 10% reported somewhat bad or bad service. In total, this means that a much larger percentage of 62% of respondents had positive views on the quality of service compared with 10% of respondents who had negative views. All participants who confirmed that they were registered with the NHS commented on the level of service provided.

Common issues for those experiencing bad service included long wait times, lack of available appointments, insufficient mental health care, and a refusal to provide interpreters. Many of these concerns listed are common to the wider UK population. Refugee specific factors like lack of interpreters can however create further challenges in accessing medical care. Comparatively, in 2013, 26% of those registered with a doctor stated that they were unhappy about the service provided, with some stating that they were left feeling neglected and that medical care was ineffective. Since then, positive change has been made as only 10% of our respondents were unhappy with the service in 2023.

An article by LGBTQ Policy Journal titled “Responding to the Needs of LGBTQ Refugees” looks at healthcare provided to LGBTQ refugees on a worldwide scale. It indicates that humanitarian actors supporting forcibly displaced people have historically neglected the needs of LGBTQ refugees. This has resulted in a significant service gap, leaving this community at higher health risks. According to the article, this oversight could be caused by various factors such as funding constraints, competing interests, and lack of awareness about the specific needs of LGBTQ refugees. It suggests that in addition to aid organisations “*designing and piloting new humanitarian interventions tailored to the specific wants and needs of LGBTQ groups...most importantly humanitarians can listen to LGBTQ refugees themselves...One of the most impactful actions we can take is to empower them and raise their voices.*” (Deem, 2019).

It is important for healthcare providers to be aware of their patients’ gender and sexuality as individuals may have specific healthcare needs as a result of this which should be taken into account. For example, LGBTQI individuals may be at a higher risk of having mental health needs including suffering from suicidal thoughts. In a 2018 report, Stonewall reported that ‘*half of LGBT people aged 18-24 (52 per cent) have thought about taking their life in the last year*’. (Bachmann & Gooch, 2018). They provide a comparative figure that ‘*According to research for NHS Digital, one in twenty adults in general reported thoughts of taking their own life in the past year*’. Similarly, significantly higher numbers of LGBT people were reported by Stonewall to have self-harmed or experienced depression in the last year compared to the wider population, and healthcare providers should be receptive to the higher risks of mental health conditions experienced by their LGBTQI patients. Physical health is no different and the needs of the LGBTQI community are important to consider in order to ensure that better care is received.

When our respondents were asked about LGBTQI status disclosure to healthcare providers, 79% of respondents who were registered with a doctor indicated that their doctors were aware of their LGBTQI status, while 20% said their doctors were not aware. 1% of respondents who were registered with the NHS did not answer this question. Similarly, in 2013, 28% of respondents said that their doctors did not know about their LGBTQI status. It is positive that the majority of respondents feel comfortable to share this information with their doctor, but important that healthcare providers continue to ensure that their environments remain or become a safe and inclusive space where LGBTQI individuals feel comfortable speaking openly so that better care can be provided. For the minority who had not shared their LGBTQI status with their doctor, reasons for nondisclosure included not being asked, feeling that it does not make a difference if the doctor knows, and respondents being uncomfortable sharing this information.

Within the wider UK population (including non-refugees), Stonewall highlighted in 2018 that *'one in five LGBT people (19 per cent) aren't out to any healthcare professional about their sexual orientation when seeking general medical care. This number rises to 40 per cent of bi men and 29 per cent of bi women'* (Bachmann & Gooch, 2018). Their report also highlighted a key reason for this was due to both fear of discrimination and many having already experienced this, as *'one in eight LGBT people (13 percent) have experienced some form of unequal treatment from healthcare staff because they're LGBT'*. Evidently, there are valid concerns around LGBTQI status disclosure to healthcare providers, who must ensure their staff provide non-discriminatory care to LGBTQI patients.

Finally, our survey also explored physical and mental health among LGBTQI refugees. Although above we saw improved perceptions on the level of healthcare service provided to LGBTQI refugees, unfortunately the overall physical and mental health of respondents has declined since the 2013 report. 32% of respondents reported having a physical illness or disability compared with 24% of respondents in 2013, while 53% indicated mental health needs compared to a much lower 28% of respondents in 2013⁵. Among those with mental health needs in 2023, 67% reported receiving support,

while 33% did not. Reasons for not receiving support included not knowing how to access support, a lack of support for LGBTQI individuals, long waiting lists, high costs, and a fear of discrimination due to refugee status. During a one-to-one conversation, one respondent, Amir from Asia, explained the difficulties for many in feeling able to seek medical assistance, stating that refugees *"from conservative backgrounds are unlikely to open up to people they don't know and discuss their issues"*.

The above sheds light on UK healthcare challenges, with some facing obstacles in accessing the care they need. Non-disclosure of LGBTQI status to healthcare providers by a fifth of respondents underlines the need for inclusive and understanding healthcare services. Additionally, the prevalence of physical and mental health needs among respondents, along with the barriers to accessing support, emphasises the importance of addressing these issues more effectively. As set out above, whilst some of the issues raised are specific to the refugee or LGBTQI refugee population who often face compounding obstacles, there are also various generic issues such as long waiting lists and high costs which are common barriers to healthcare experienced across the wider UK population.

⁵ Although note that as per the executive summary, this was strictly respondents suffering from depression and post-traumatic disorders. Other mental health conditions were not considered in 2013



Media

The way individuals access and engage with news and media is a fundamental aspect of their integration into a new society. In this section, we explore how our survey respondents are accessing news and the extent to which they are maintaining connections with their home countries. The data we have gathered reflects a diverse range of news consumption habits, revealing a mix of preferences among LGBTQI refugees in the UK.

News consumption habits

The data indicates a diverse range of news consumption among LGBTQI refugees in the UK. 72% of survey respondents mentioned accessing UK news, 59% of which indicated that they only access UK news whereas the remaining 41% indicated that they access UK news in addition to home country news. 6% of participants answered that they exclusively access home country news. 3% of participants indicated that they do not access any sources of news, 1% answered that they use YouTube but did not indicate whether that was to access UK or home country news and 17% of participants did not respond to this question. These findings highlight a mix of preferences, suggesting that some respondents are interested in maintaining connections with their home country while also staying informed about the UK.

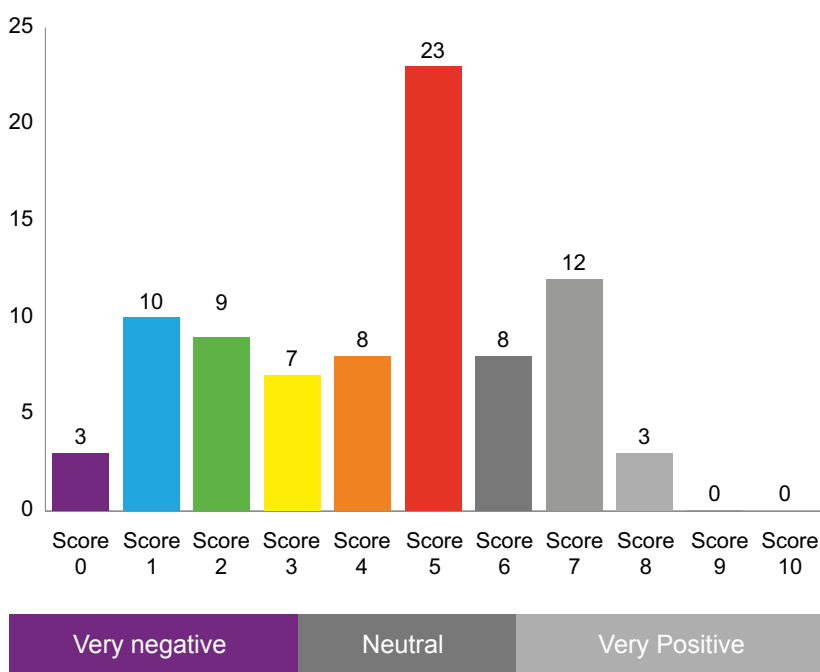
Perception of refugees in the UK media

A 2023 study by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) carried out a comparative analysis of the role of media narratives in shaping public opinion towards refugees. The report focused on two case studies, Ukrainian displacement following the Russian invasion in 2022 and the 2015 refugee ‘crisis’, which involved an influx of Syrian refugees. The study reflected on the differences in media portrayals of refugees in terms of perceptions of threat, refugee legitimacy, or economic contribution. Results revealed “striking differences” between the coverage of Ukrainian and Syrian refugees in the media and indicated that narratives were undoubtedly influenced by factors such as race, proximity, and gender. The study recommended increased efforts to guarantee fair and precise media coverage of migration and displacement. (McCann, Sienkiewicz, & Zard, 2023)

Perceptions of refugees in the media can have a huge impact on public opinion towards refugees, and as a result their treatment in their host country. Our survey respondents were asked about how they think the UK media portrays refugees on a scale of 0 – 10, with 0 being very negative and 10 being very positive. The results reveal a spectrum of perspectives as set out below.

Perceptions of refugees in the media

Our survey respondents were asked about how they think the UK media portrays refugees on a scale of 0 – 10, with 0 being **very negative** and 10 being **very positive**. The results reveal a spectrum of perspectives.



As demonstrated by the above chart, the scores consisted of:

- 6% of respondents who believed that there is a strongly positive portrayal of refugees by the UK media (scores of 8 to 10).
- 20% of respondents believed that refugees were portrayed positively in the UK media (scores of 6 to 7).
- 23% of respondents took a neutral view (scores of 5).
- 15% of respondents who believed that refugees are portrayed negatively (scores of 3 to 4).
- 22% of respondents believed that refugees are portrayed very negatively (scores of 0 to 2).
- 12% of participants did not give a score.

These responses together total 38% of LGBTQI refugees who believed the UK media portray refugees negatively and a lesser 26% who believed there was a positive perception. This highlights the need for more balanced and positive representations fostering openness and acceptance, counteracting negative stereotypes and biases. Ultimately, understanding both how refugees access news and their perceptions of media portrayals is vital for crafting inclusive and informed strategies for refugee integration and community cohesion.

In qualitative survey feedback, a considerable number of respondents who believed that the UK media portrayed refugees negatively, emphasised a perceived bias in how refugees are depicted. Common response themes included the perception of refugees as bad people and troublemakers, as burdens on the UK economy and the view that UK media incites a culture of fear towards refugees. These themes are demonstrated in the following responses:

“Refugees are put in a category as bad people. Not all of us are troublesome people. We...actually want to thrive in life and plan for the future. Get into the property markets, get educated and improve our lives.”

— Female from Africa.

“The UK media encourages hostility and fear towards refugees.”

— Female from the Caribbean.

“I think British people are scared of refugees.”

— Person from the Middle East.

“Refugees are portrayed as a burden to the UK economy.”

— Person from Africa.

“Refugees are always portrayed to be needy, and taking from the UK government. But there are refugees who have made their way up the ladder and are successful and contributing to the society. And that doesn't get talked about much.”

— Male from Africa.

Additionally, one respondent commented on the importance of fair media perceptions of refugees in relation to their ability to inform wider public views. The respondent, a female from the Caribbean, stated that *“Media make and break. If the media portrait refugee and asylum seekers positive then so will the people of the country”*.

Previously our 2013 report recommended that it was important to monitor and change the language used by media and political discourses when referring to asylum seekers and refugees, as often stigmatising terms such as ‘illegal’ are misused to describe this group, which can contribute to negative stereotypes and hostile living environments. By looking at the number of respondents in 2023 who believed the media still portrayed refugees negatively, there is clearly further progress to be made.

Given the current climate in the UK, we anticipate that the narrative towards asylum seekers and refugees will be difficult to improve in the near future, despite the evident need for it to do so.

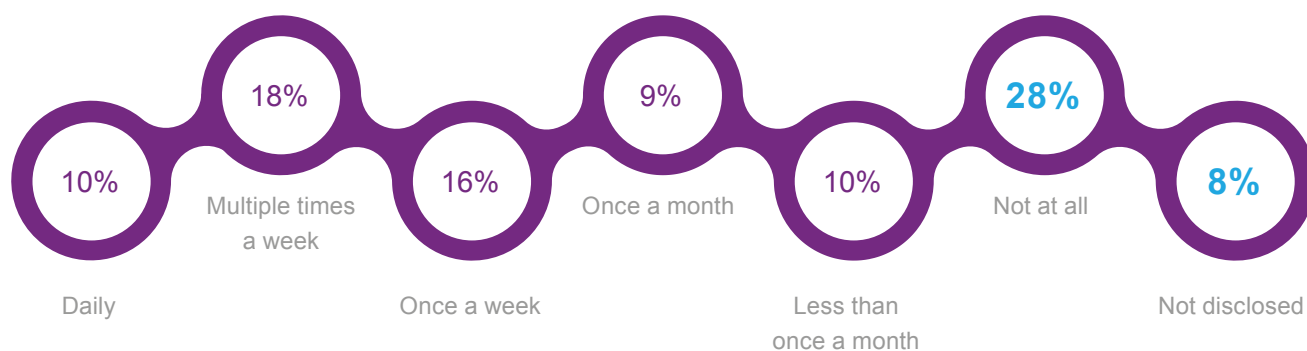
Social life

Frequency of contact with family

Our respondents were asked how often on average they speak to their families. A variety of frequencies were reported, as depicted by the following chart:

45% of respondents speak to their families on a regular basis (being the range from daily to once a week), but 28% do not speak to their families at all. 8% of participants did not provide an answer to this question. One respondent mentioned that it was not safe for them to contact anyone from their home country due to their LGBTQI status and that they had to “cut off my best friend... for my safety and for her too”.

Frequency of contact with family



Family awareness of LGBTQI status

Most of our respondents reported that their families know about their LGBTQI status. 16% of respondents' families do not know about their status, with the following reasons cited (in the 12 responses):

- respondents believed their families wouldn't accept them or would have a negative response;
- cited their families' religion as meaning they would not accept the respondents' LGBTQI status and they would be rejected or disowned;
- believed that their families would kill them if they knew about their LGBTQI status;
- referenced their families' traditional values or culture as meaning the respondent being LGBTQI would not be acceptable to their families; and
- some respondents did not want to talk about their LGBTQI status due to fear.

Family and friends in the UK

The majority of our survey respondents did not have family in the UK before arriving – of the 90 people who answered this question, only 18% had family already in the UK before they came to the country. Similarly, only 16% had friends in the UK before they arrived.

Positively, 79% of respondents have made new friends in the UK since arriving. Around half of respondents see these friends every week, with the remainder split roughly evenly between once a month, less than once a month and not at all in person. Respondents mentioned that online groups can be a beneficial support network where members can chat, share events, wish each other happy birthday etc. This had a positive effect with comments such as “it brings up my day”. Similarly, when asked this question in 2013, almost all respondents (96%) reported having made friends in the UK.

Our respondents most frequently engage in daytime socialisation with their friends, with common activities including going on walks together, going shopping, exercising together such as running or going to the gym, and meeting for lunch/coffee. Evening socialisation was also popular, with respondents noting that they would go out for meals with their friends, go to the cinema or go out for drinks (including to bars, clubs and parties). Additionally, respondents commonly mentioned that they enjoyed just chatting and spending quality time with their friends.

Of our respondents who have made new friends since moving to the UK, 94% of them reported that their new friends know about their LGBTQI status. When asked this question in 2013, all respondents stated that they were open about their sexuality with their LGBTQI friends and most were also open with their straight friends.

For respondents who reported that they had not made any friends, reasons cited included being moved around whilst their asylum claims were pending, fear of people due to past experiences and feelings of isolation. One respondent who cited the issue of moving between locations, stated that they had difficulties making friends and joining support networks because of this, which created loneliness and a sense of isolation.

Socialisation with others from home countries

When asked whether they meet with people from their home country, 64% of respondents stated that they do not. 33% did not want to meet anyone from their home country for reasons such as:

- believing that they would discriminate against them, judge them, or hate them for their LGBTQI status;
- believing that people from their home country are homophobic due to culture or religion;
- being afraid of people from their home country because, for example, they might report the respondents' LGBTQI status back to their home country.

Likewise, in 2013, 32% of respondents stated that they did not meet people from their home countries, with a further 4% stating 'not so much' and the remainder stating that they did meet people from their home country, however these people were mostly lesbian and gay. 50% of 2013 respondents stated that their co-national friends were also refugees. Out of our 2023 respondents who did report meeting with people from their home country, 63% reported that those people were also refugees, 78% reported that these friends knew that the respondent was LGBTQI, and 69% reported that these people were also LGBTQI. It is clear that many LGBTQI refugees, despite the safety of the UK, continue to fear discrimination and mistreatment by others from their home country. Where they feel comfortable to socialise with others from their home countries, often these are other refugees and/or LGBTQI individuals.

Socialisation with refugees from other countries

43% of our respondents reported that they meet up with refugees from countries other than their home countries, of which 91% know that the respondent is LGBTQI. One respondent who has not told other refugees of their LGBTQI status reported that they have not done so because of fear of discrimination, while another respondent stated that this was due to homophobia from other refugees who hated LGBTQI people "*with a passion*".

Participation in LGBTQI events, organisations and clubs

66% of respondents attend LGBTQI meetings/events/clubs and 44% of respondents are members of LGBTQI organisations. Popular activities included respondents attending Pride events in various locations, going to gay villages in Birmingham, Manchester and Soho in London, and gay clubs. Similarly, 60% of our 2013 respondents had made friends through associations such as Lesbian & Gay Immigration Group and 32% stated that they frequented and made friends in bars and clubs.

Of the respondents who attend LGBTQI groups and events, a number attended the LGBT Health and Wellbeing Refugee Project; mentioned they had found LGBTQI inclusive church services or attended an LGBTQI running group.

Participation in refugee related events, organisations and clubs

17% of respondents detailed participation in activities or groups related to their refugee status. One respondent attended Unity Sisters, a self-organised support group in Scotland for asylum-seeking women, refugees and their children, while another had joined CodeYourFuture, which provides coding training for refugees and disadvantaged people.

Religion and beliefs

Respondents' religious beliefs and practice of their beliefs in the UK

53% respondents identified as religious or spiritual, with their beliefs broken down as set out in the chart.

10% of participants did not provide an answer to this question.

67% of respondents who reported being religious or spiritual stated that they practise their religion in the UK. For those who no longer practise their religion, the most common reason was that LGBTQI people are not accepted in their religion. Other reasons included being unable to find a place where they fit in, not feeling mentally well enough and not feeling comfortable to do so.

Religious/spiritual beliefs



Socialisation with others sharing the same beliefs

A 2021 article by James Charles Fensham considered the challenges faced by religiously involved LGBTQI migrants and refugees. It set out that LGBTQI individuals may not have the same level of support from family and their religion compared to migrants and refugees who do not identify as LGBTQI, which often leads to additional mental health challenges and risks compared to non-LGBTQI refugees. The article sets out that these risks may include suicidal thoughts, depression, substance abuse, social isolation and difficulties trusting others. To overcome these risks, it emphasises the importance of

“individuals finding a new life-giving and affirming religious community that they can trust. Where this is not possible, the formation of informal religious networks of affirming support might present an alternative.” (Fensham, 2021).

During a one-to-one conversation, Erica, a lesbian from Africa told us that she takes her children to a Catholic church in the UK, however she does not feel able to share her LGBTQI status with the church due to her fear of being judged or ostracised. Erica's fears stem partly from one of her friends in the UK having a negative experience after disclosing she was LGBTQI to her church. After doing so, church members stopped talking to Erica's friend and Erica fears the same thing will happen to her.

Notwithstanding the experiences of some LGBTQI refugees such as Erica, many of our respondents have managed to maintain their connections with others of the same faith despite their LGBTQI identities. Of the survey respondents who reported as being religious or spiritual, 71% indicated that they socialise with other people practising their same belief. Of those who socialise with other people practising the same religion, most felt a sense of belonging within that group. 60% of respondents socialising with people practising the same religion have told the group about their LGBTQI status, showing that religion can be accepting of LGBTQI identities. Of the 40% that have not shared their LGBTQI status, the most common reason cited is a fear of discrimination and rejection.

It is positive that over half of religious respondents felt comfortable sharing their LGBTQI status with their religious communities in the UK, but there is still progress to be made in ensuring LGBTQI refugees can locate religious communities which will accept them and support them during their integration journey. Our recommendations for religious organisations state that they must recognise the important role that they can play, and the support that they can provide, in assisting with the integration of LGBTQI refugees. They should also seek training on how to create inclusive environments, including on how to challenge LGBTQI-phobic behaviours within their communities, to further acceptance of the LGBTQI community and remove the fear of discrimination for many.

Membership of other groups/association/organisations

Only 18% of respondents told us that they are part of a group/association/organisation that is not related to refugees or LGBTQI. Examples of responses include an online yoga class and attending church. Two respondents engaged in volunteering work for community organisations, with one helping to distribute donated items to the local community, and another assisting with secretarial work. Other respondents attend networks and support groups which provide assistance to those with disabilities and long-term health conditions, or support for single parents to prevent food poverty.

The groups generally meet infrequently, with most meeting once a month, irregularly or only on Zoom. 28% meet more regularly, either once a week or fortnightly. 53% of respondents who reported attending groups not related to refugees or LGBTQI people had heard about these groups from friends, and 89% indicated their groups are aware of their LGBTQI status.

Some respondents provided suggestions including the need for more programmes involving the children of LGBTQI people, rather than just focusing on the adults, and that more racial diversity in groups/charities would allow more racialised groups to feel comfortable to come out.



Photograph taken by Micro Rainbow. This image is not of an individual featured in the report.

Integration: Chris' story

During a one-to-one conversation, Chris spoke to one of our researchers about his experiences of integrating into life in the UK.

Chris is a gay man from Asia who came to the UK on a student visa in 2011. When the college he was attending closed down, he was terrified of returning home due to his fear that he would be targeted for being gay. Growing up, he faced a lot of homophobia and bullying from within his own family, in addition to bullying and even sexual abuse by other teenagers whilst he was at school. When Chris told his parents about the abuse he had suffered, they told Chris he was to blame because he acted like a female. Chris was homeless in the UK for many years but still could not even consider returning to his country of origin due to the treatment he had endured. He eventually claimed asylum in 2020. His initial claim was rejected but he appealed and was granted refugee status in February 2023.

Chris initially felt well supported with his integration into British society as he was working with a support worker at a refugee charity. Through this organisation he attended English classes which helped him to develop his English language skills. He lives in another part of the country now and misses the support that the charity and his support worker gave him.

While Chris experienced a lot of discrimination and bullying in his country of origin for being gay, he suffered similar discrimination in the UK. When he was in shared accommodation with 15 others, one of the other residents would bully him, saying things like *"oh, I'm confused. Are you men? Are you woman, what [is] your gender?"* Chris is a practising Muslim but found that these homophobic attitudes are also prevalent among his own religious community in the UK. He has experienced discrimination in other settings too. Once, while in a chicken shop in East London, another customer walked in,

shouted homophobic abuse at him and threatened to kill him. Chris was fortunate that during this incident, he was defended by the shop owner who threatened to call the police and walked Chris to the tube station so that he could return home safely. However, this incident shows the severity of the discrimination that LGBTQI people still face in the UK and that the outcome of this incident could have been, and in many cases is significantly more serious and violent.

After speaking to the local Council about his issues in shared accommodation due to his sexuality, and the impacts this had on his mental health, Chris was moved to a studio flat. Although he is now a lot happier living on his own, Chris still experiences flashbacks and nightmares about the discrimination he has faced in the UK. He finds he has a lack of confidence and gets very nervous around other people. Chris managed to get an appointment with a psychologist who diagnosed him with PTSD. He was referred for a hospital consultation but is still on the waiting list to be seen. Chris has also found it difficult to obtain employment due to his mental health difficulties but, once he gets better, he is planning to train to be a teacher. While his experience of discrimination in the UK has been incredibly distressing, he has found attending counselling has given him some peace of mind.

Chris' experiences of discrimination in the UK have impacted his integration journey as well as his mental health. Chris has found it difficult to make friends during his time in the UK as he had been moved around as during his asylum process, meaning he hasn't been able to build a network of people to support him. He has not felt comfortable among his own Muslim community, instead feeling isolated and unable to connect with other people. Though he finds it difficult to trust others, Chris is now thinking of socialising more among the LGBTQI community where he feels like he can be himself.



Moving on

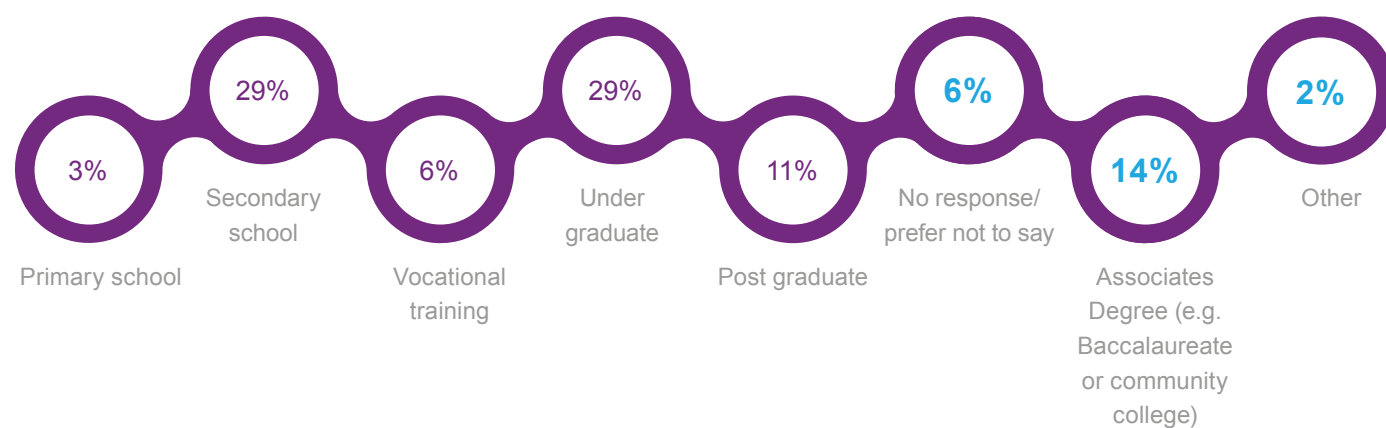
Education

Respondents' educational attainment ranged from primary school to postgraduate, with 83% of respondents having an education level of secondary school or higher. 29% of all respondents completed secondary school, 14% had completed an Associate's Degree such as a Baccalaureate or qualifications from community college, 6% had vocational training, 29% were graduates and 11% were postgraduates in their home countries. However, 63% of qualified respondents (having qualifications attained at secondary school or higher) reported that their qualification was not recognised in the UK or were unsure whether it was recognised. This figure is a 14% increase compared to the 50% of respondents in our 2013 report who reported that their qualifications gained in their home countries were not valid in the UK⁶, preventing individuals from using them.

Even where respondents expressed their qualifications were recognised in the UK, only 47% were able to make use of those qualifications. Although a vast improvement from just 4% of respondents in 2013 who were making use of their qualifications, 2023's figure remains disappointing. Of the total respondents, 44% reported they were currently pursuing education in the UK, focusing on English language, healthcare, computing, vocational training, and various fields at undergraduate level. Similarly, in our 2013 report, 34% of respondents were pursuing education and re-training in order to find a job that was relevant to what they studied.

Many LGBTQI individuals who have sought refuge in a new country may have been forced to leave their education behind due to the hostile environment they faced in their home country. Discrimination, violence, and persecution based on sexual orientation or gender identity can severely disrupt a person's ability to pursue higher education. Of our respondents who wanted to continue their education but couldn't, the key reasons for discontinuing education are set out below.

Educational attainment



⁶ Note: It was not reported in 2013 how many respondents were unsure if their qualifications were recognised in the UK.

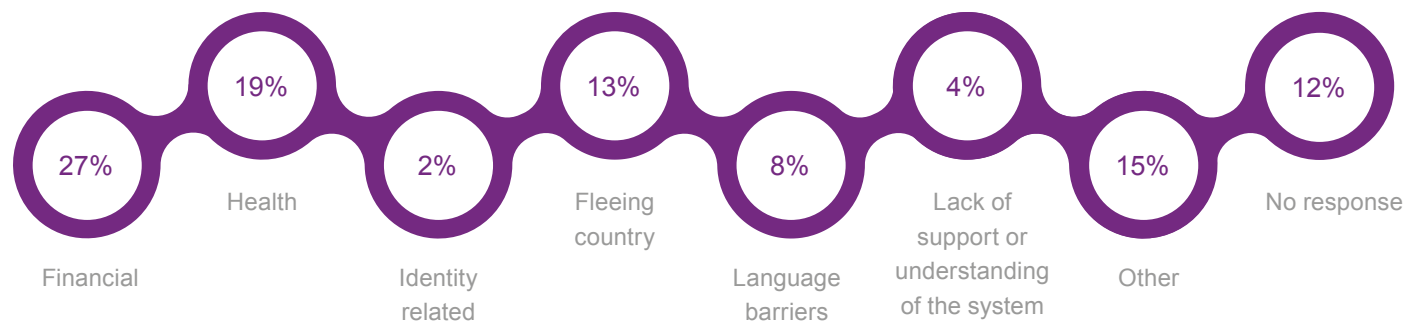
Financial stress was highlighted as the most prominent reason, followed by poor physical or mental health. In some instances, the LGBTQI identity of respondents led to them being discriminated against, discontinuing their studies and ultimately seeking refugee status in the UK. In a one-to-one conversation with one of our researchers, another respondent, David, a 23-year-old trans man told us “...I came here before I finished university. I could not complete it. I had to run away and come here...” David explained that as he was unable to complete his university studies, he has not yet managed to find a job, because he is not educated to a degree-level. Another respondent reported in our survey that their education was discontinued due to forced marriage.

According to the UNHCR’s second edition of the Global Refugee Higher Education newsletter that was published in 2023, the refugee enrolment rate in higher education across the globe was around 6% in 2020 (Stulgaitis & Bordbar, 2023). Research in the field identified several challenges faced by refugees when accessing higher education. Issues include language barriers, knowledge of the host country’s higher education system, finances, and lack of educational documentation (Lantero & Finocchietti, 2023).

Our survey asked respondents who were not currently pursuing education in the UK whether they would like to, and if so, what were the reasons they were unable to do so. Our respondents reported issues including those set out above, with the most common being the cost of pursuing further education. Additionally, respondents mentioned a lack of resources such as laptops required to participate in online classes, poor mental health preventing them from feeling able to begin education and not having the time to pursue education, due to needing to work to support themselves financially.

Whilst these are common challenges, especially amongst people in lower income brackets, over 60% of the individuals surveyed reported educational achievements that would assist them to gain employment, reduce their reliance on benefits and enhance their social and economic integration by contributing to their community.

Reason for discontinuing education



To begin to improve access to education, our recommendations set out that readily available training and education programmes including English language courses would be beneficial to LGBTQI refugees, with a focus on upskilling. Job fairs/seminars would also be beneficial, providing information on different career paths and a platform for individuals to discuss opportunities with potential employers. Individuals could use these events to learn about the educational requirements for specific careers and any further education they may need to undertake to be eligible for a particular role.

Employment

Employment plays a crucial role in the integration of refugees into their new communities, providing not only economic stability but also a sense of belonging and purpose. As a general rule, until refugee status is obtained, individuals seeking asylum are not permitted to work in the UK. There are exceptions to this rule, for example where a person has waited over 12 months for a decision on their application they can apply for permission to work, which is restricted to jobs on the Shortage Occupation List. This, however, still means that after an individual arrives in the UK, they may be unable to work and support themselves financially until at least after this 12-month period has elapsed, significantly hindering the integration process and often leaving individuals in situations of poverty due to their reliance on the state.

Of the total respondents, 31% confirmed they had the right to work when seeking asylum in the UK and of those, half confirmed having held a job during this period. However, for those who were not entitled to work whilst their asylum claim was pending, this inability to be financially self-sufficient led to reliance on support such as food banks and charities. Erica, a lesbian woman stated that *“I wish at this point maybe we had access to work so we don’t have to really be dependent on charities and all handouts”*.

There has been long-running debate as to whether asylum seekers should be allowed to work in the UK. Many believe this is crucial to assist integration once an individual’s refugee status is granted, as they will have already been given the opportunity to obtain some financial independence. Research conducted by the Red Cross stated that *“finding work and somewhere to live, and applying for benefits, often takes much longer than 28 days. In some cases it can take up to three months...simply because of the time it takes to get them set up on the system, many are falling into poverty through no fault of their own.”* (British Red Cross, 2023)



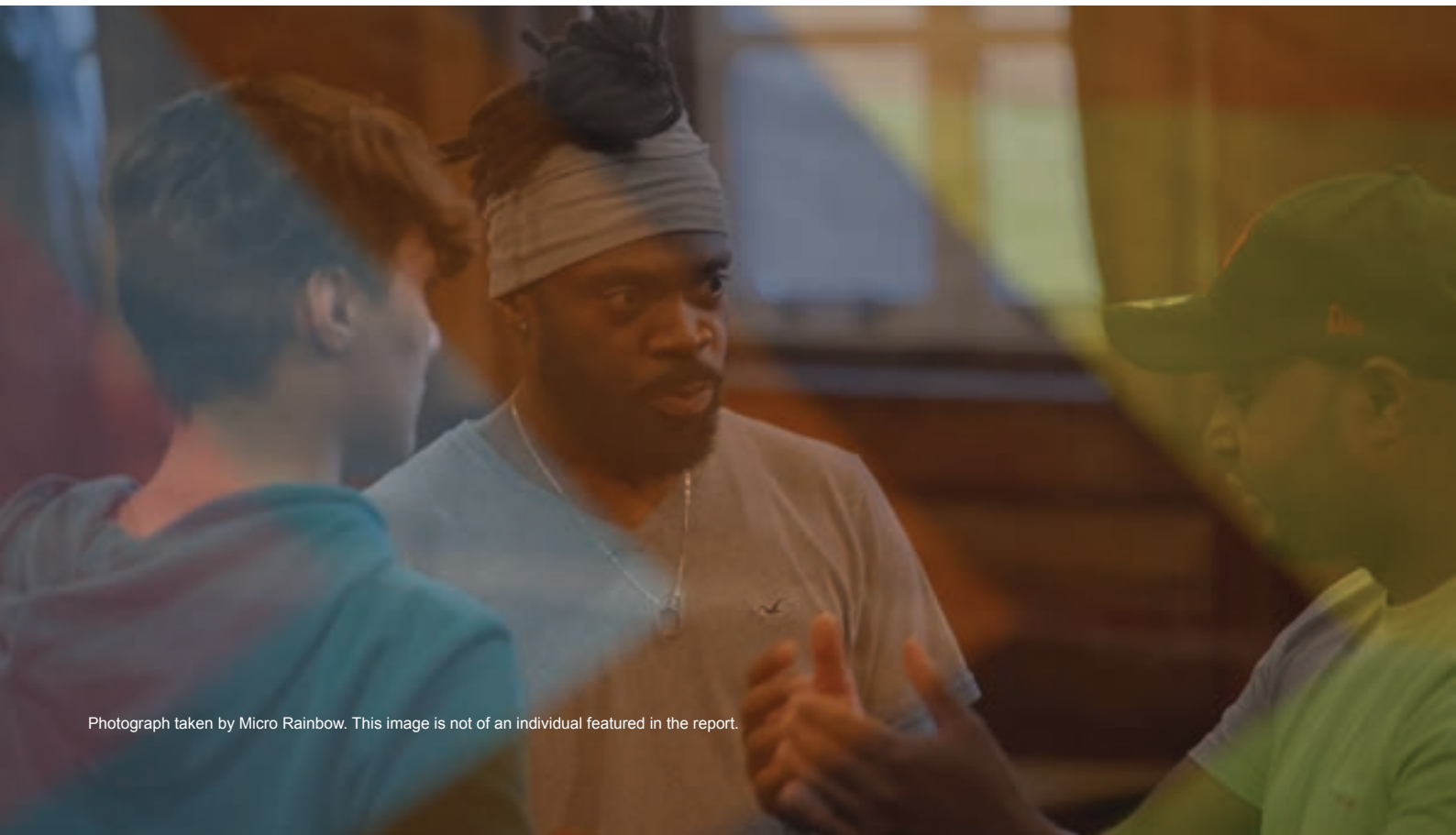
Permitting asylum seekers to work whilst their claims are pending would provide the opportunity for them to make positive contributions to society from the outset, rather than having to rely on state handouts and wait for the grant of their refugee status. Whilst asylum seekers remain unable to work, they cannot build up any relevant work experience in the UK. Once they are granted refugee status, many struggle to obtain jobs at first due to the lack of relevant experience and unwillingness of some employers to recognise work experience gained outside of the UK. In our 2013 report, our recommendations urged policy makers to re-consider the policy on asylum seekers' rights to work. Again, we urge policy makers to review this policy, as it is contributing to poverty and financial struggles for many individuals.

A report published in 2022 by the House of Commons Library sets out that "*UK policy is more restrictive than many comparable countries due to a combination of the 12-month waiting period for eligibility to work and the shortage occupation list rule*". It details varying approaches in other jurisdictions, including Canada's provision for asylum seekers to be able to work immediately, the USA's 6 month waiting period and EU law's requirement for member states to allow access to the job market after nine months of waiting for their claim to be determined (Gower, McKinney, & Meade, 2022). In reconsidering the UK policy, policymakers could look to follow in the footsteps of other jurisdictions who allow asylum seekers to work, either immediately or after a much shorter time frame of waiting for a decision on their claim has passed.

Even after refugee status is granted, accessing employment can be hugely challenging for refugees. Since obtaining refugee status, 36% of all respondents (at the time of responding) were working. Of those in work, jobs included roles such as software engineer, business analyst, receptionist or healthcare provider or delivery person or shop assistant. Similarly, at the time of our 2013 report, only 38% of respondents were currently working. The 2013 respondents were primarily employed in security, care, cleaning/ housekeeping and administrative roles.

Being able to access information on available jobs empowers refugees by providing them with the knowledge and resources needed to navigate the job market effectively. It enables them to make informed decisions about their career paths, understand their rights as employees, and access support services or training programmes if necessary. Respondents were asked about the ease of accessing information on available jobs in the UK. Whilst many respondents were able to find this information on the internet, some felt it was "*scattered all over the place*". Other respondents highlighted a specific careers fair for refugees would be helpful.

Just under three quarters (71%) of respondents had searched for a job in the UK. For those who were unsuccessful in securing or retaining a role, the lack of relevant UK work experience or qualifications was a common theme. One issue appears to be the intersectionality between their refugee status and LGBTQI identity. Those with refugee status experienced difficulties in evidencing their past experiences, and LGBTQI discrimination in their home countries often affected the respondents' ability to begin or complete further study.



Some respondents explained the difficulties in matching their qualifications to the UK market. In many instances, respondents wished to leverage their previous experiences in various fields, however due to a lack of recognition in the UK job market, they were unable to obtain a job in their chosen field. The issue of upskilling becomes a moot point, as in most cases, financial hardship impedes upskilling. The financial instability experienced by many refugees prevents them from accessing education and training programmes that would enable them to upskill for better job prospects. This in turn hinders their efforts to compete in the UK job market.

Amir, a gay man stated that “[My] experiences and education from my country of origin didn’t quite match the UK job market. For most people who have experience working with different organisations in it is totally different here... you’ll probably get rejected as nothing from your CV applies”.

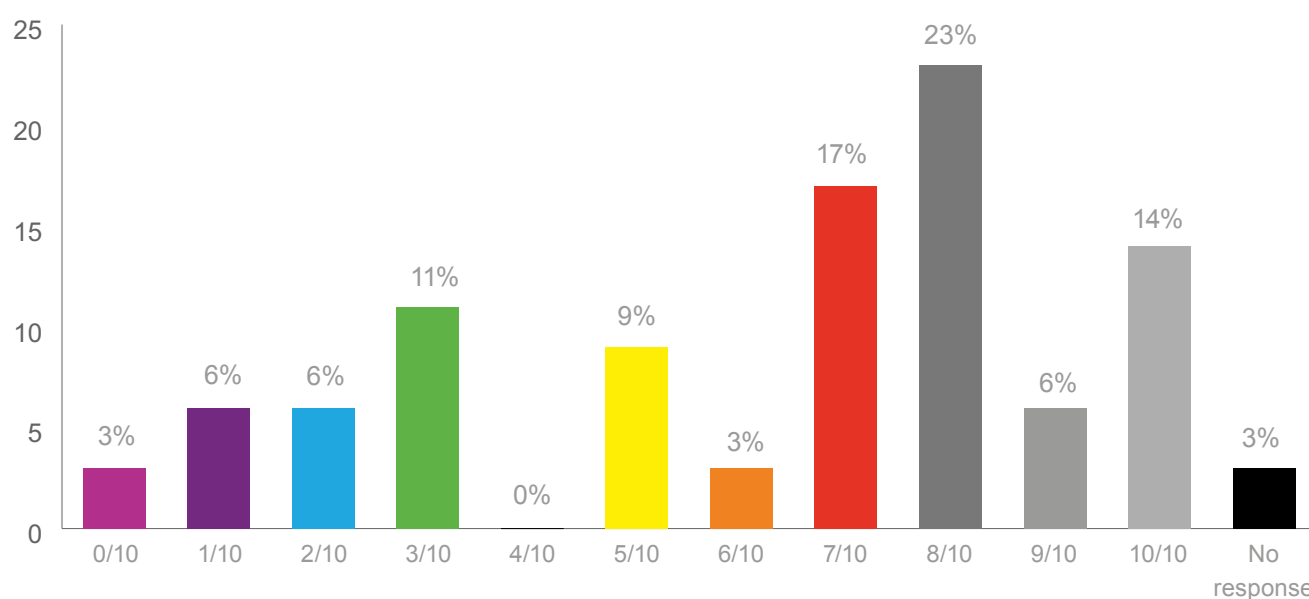
Bianca, a lesbian told us that despite being a trained social worker, she was unable to work in the UK in the field due to a need for further training. Her challenge in financing further qualifications “...means I have to go to uni, and then uni has to be paid for. So I have to ask for a loan”, is not uncommon among the respondents.

Similar findings are set out in a report by the Williams Institute in 2022, which reviewed existing literature to examine the experiences of LGBTQI refugees and asylum seekers worldwide. The study suggests that the intersection of multiple marginalities can significantly impact the prospects of LGBTQI individuals in the host country. This complex interplay of various forms of marginalisation can create barriers for these individuals, hindering their ability to secure meaningful employment opportunities and integrate into the workforce of the host nation (Shaw & Verghese, 2022).

For those respondents who were currently employed, around 71% were employed in full-time permanent or part-time roles whereas only 26% of respondents reported to have a job in their area of expertise or field of study. In comparison, 38% of our respondents in 2013 were employed, with 28% in full-time positions. Only 10% of respondents in 2013 had a role which was relevant to the studies they had undertaken in their home countries. Our results show that there has been a 16% increase in the percentage of respondents who are now employed in roles relating to their area of expertise. However, given the percentage of respondents who have higher education qualifications (54%), it is disappointing that not more of them have been able to secure relevant careers which they have experience in and a passion for.

Respondents who are currently working were asked to indicate how happy they were in their jobs by giving a score out of 10, where 0 indicated that they were very unhappy and 10 indicated that they were very happy. Somewhat encouragingly, most respondents reported they were happy with their current roles. In fact, while 44% of those working stated that they were moderately happy with their current role (giving a score of 6 to 8), 21% stated that they were very happy (giving a score of 9 to 10). 18% of respondents told us that they were not happy with their current role (giving a score of 2 to 4), with only 9% stating they were very unhappy (giving a score of 0-1). 9% of respondents indicated that they were neutral (giving a score of 5). The remaining 3% of respondents who are currently in employment did not answer the question. Hamish, said “...I’ve been fortunate in the way things happened, but that’s because I was looking for information. I was a prepared person and when you are prepared, opportunities come to you...”

Job satisfaction (on a scale of 0-10)



51% of those currently employed expressed they would like to change their job given the right opportunity. The reasons for wanting to change job included seeking better career opportunities, better pay, hours or job security like permanent, full-time roles. When asked this question in 2013, 68% of employed respondents stated that they would like to change their job, for similar reasons such as for better pay and because of a lack of passion or interest in what they were currently doing.

Although some progress appears to have been made, evidently LGBTQI refugees still face substantial difficulties in entering the UK job market and accessing skilled work in the field which they are trained in. To combat these barriers, our recommendations suggest that employers should make an effort to increase their awareness of refugee rights to work and acceptable documents, as well as being more flexible in accepting and valuing work experience gained outside of the UK. LGBTQI refugees can be extremely valuable members of the UK economy, bringing diverse experiences, new perspectives and expertise to their employers. UK businesses should take steps to ensure that this pool of talent is not prohibited from taking up opportunities and should actively seek to create an environment that LGBTQI refugees can be a part of. Our recommendations suggest that employers should undertake training within their organisations on how to create inclusive working environments, to understand refugee and LGBTQI issues, LGBTQI identities and the intersectionality of being LGBTQI and a refugee.

Access to banking, loans, and finance

Access to banking, loans, and finance contributes to greater independence of refugees and fosters greater inclusion and integration in society. By providing them with access to financial services, they are empowered to build a more secure and stable future for themselves and their families. When asked, respondents noted needing access to banking for a variety of reasons including start-up capital for a business, financing for further education, and support for personal expenses such as groceries.

Encouragingly, 88% of respondents confirmed they had a bank account. 10% of respondents did not answer the question and two respondents (2%) indicated that they did not have a bank account. Only one respondent (1%) indicated they had no bank account due to a failure to prove their address when applying. This is extremely encouraging, given that refugees often experience displacement and may reside in temporary shelters, refugee camps, or transitional housing facilities upon arrival in their host countries. These living situations may not have formal addresses or may involve shared accommodations with other refugee families, making it difficult for individuals

to provide a specific address that meets the requirements of traditional banking processes. However, in practice it is positive to see that only one respondent had encountered a difficulty with opening a bank account for this reason, suggesting that generally the UK banking system is accessible to many refugees.

Most respondents had never applied for a loan in the UK, with only 14% applying. Most of those respondents who have applied for a loan told us they were using their loan to repay debt for “everyday living”, with the lack of finance largely being because they did not or could not get a job. In comparison, a larger percentage of respondents (34%) of those surveyed in 2013 had applied for loans. The most frequent reasons for applying for loans in 2013 included: buying household items or furniture, to study, to start a small business and to bring a partner to the UK.

There exists a complex relationship between the challenges faced by refugees in obtaining loans from financial institutions and the issue of unemployment. Many refugees are unable to invest in education and skills training programmes, which are crucial for securing employment opportunities, because of the difficulties in accessing the capital to do so. The lack of financial resources also restricts their ability to cover essential living expenses while actively seeking employment. This prolongs a cycle of unemployment among refugees, as they encounter significant barriers in accessing resources to enhance their employability and sustain themselves during the job search process.

With access to the jobs market being a barrier to most respondents, it is not surprising that 49% of the respondents had considered opening a small business, although this figure is lower than the 78% of respondents in 2013 who had considered doing so. 54% of our 2023 respondents who would consider opening a small business specified they would require a loan to do so, with 41% of those respondents specifying an amount they would need. The amounts of money required to open the desired businesses ranged from GBP5,000 to GBP500,000 with an average amount of GBP63,333 needed. Interestingly, where respondents could describe their desired enterprise, they wished to be in the services sector, such as hairdressing and restaurants.

As evidenced above, gaining access to loans and finance can be difficult for refugees. They may be disadvantaged for various reasons, including because they may be unable to evidence a sufficient UK credit history. As such, our recommendations set out that when considering providing credit to support a new business run by a refugee, banks and financial institutions should take into account that the individual might not have a credit history or the usual credentials that the average applicant would have.

Moving on: Hamish's story

One of our respondents, Hamish, is a gay man from Africa. Hamish participated in a one-to-one conversation with one of our researchers and told us his story about moving on and settling into his new life in the UK.

Hamish arrived in the UK in January 2020 and claimed asylum immediately. It took over two years for Hamish's asylum claim to be determined, and in May 2022, he obtained leave to remain. As soon as Hamish received his refugee status, he began looking for a job, telling our researcher that *"[I] just started to insert myself into society and [was] just trying to pick back the pieces of my life and try to rebuild myself"*.

Before coming to the UK, Hamish attended university in another African country and obtained some work experience there, before returning to his home country. Unfortunately, Hamish later had to leave due to his sexuality and being unable to live there openly. Hamish explained that his work experience is "decent", but this coupled with his qualification from his home country is not strong enough for him to *"fully seize the opportunities that are available here in the UK"*. Because of this, Hamish explored the possibility of carrying out further education in the UK, specifically obtaining a master's degree.

Hamish has not yet been able to pursue further studies in the UK as he is unable finance them. He considered getting a loan to finance his studies, but after many of his work colleagues told him that they are still repaying their student loans years later, Hamish became concerned about the extensive period of time which it would take him to repay a loan. However, Hamish has not given up on pursuing his goal of obtaining a master's degree and is now looking into alternative options including whether there may be any scholarships that he is eligible for.

Hamish also spoke to the very human challenges that LGBTQI refugees face. *"You get refugees from all ranks from all social walks of life, well-educated ones, lawyers, doctors, engineers and people who actually can add value once they're accepted into the society"*. But despite LGBTQI refugees often being highly qualified and able to contribute to understaffed sectors, they face a perception of *"taking away resources"* or being an expense to the country. Hamish hopes that the narrative can change about LGBTQI refugees. He appeals to us to be empathetic, to change our mindset, and to challenge our biases to make our society more inclusive for himself, and the many other LGBTQI refugees in the UK.

Adding to the challenges of a new country, loneliness, discrimination, and information on jobs is hard to come by. Hamish's resourcefulness and indomitable spirit led him to use the internet to look for scholarships and jobs. He notes that he was lucky in having internet access, LGBTQI support groups, and some governmental guidance, but suggests consolidating resources into a portal for refugees as searching for jobs would ease the process further. This resourcefulness and perseverance is not unique to Hamish, and is seen in many of the respondents, but his story highlights the importance of allyship and community spirit.

Hamish's determination to integrate into UK life led to him reaching out to the local job centre for assistance with finding opportunities as well as attending an employability workshop with Micro Rainbow. Through this workshop he connected with a lawyer who became a mentor to him and introduced Hamish to some recruitment agencies. Hamish was able to obtain a receptionist role at a law firm, before obtaining an administration role with his current employer. Hamish details the importance of preparation in obtaining new opportunities and moving on with his new life.

That said, the process remains challenging. Hamish recounts that he waited for two years for permission to work in the care work sector; traditionally an area that is short staffed. However, even in such employment, he faced bullying, harassment, and social exclusion. He notes a specific story where he overheard senior employees making homophobic remarks. Such comments made him feel unsafe and unwelcome to reveal his sexuality and should serve as a conscientious reminder that our words and comments impact individuals directly.

Hamish's story of moving on is reflective of many of the shared experiences of the LGBTQI refugees who have fled to the UK to escape their country of origin. His story is a lived example that while many refugees are highly educated, they struggle to gain access to skilled roles in the UK job market. This then has a compounding effect as they struggle to access finance for opportunities which would allow them to develop relevant skills and access further education. Typically, it becomes an impossible decision between funding their daily necessities and further education, which would enable gainful employment in their chosen field.

Conclusions

Whilst 91% of LGBTQI refugees feel safer in the UK than they did in their home countries – they are able to enjoy many of the fundamental freedoms that the UK offers, develop strong friendships and have good access to services like healthcare and banking, in many areas, the results of our research make for unhappy reading. Many of the same difficulties have been identified and have been exacerbated as austerity measures, the *'hostile environment'* policy, and the cost-of-living crisis have each taken their toll. It is clear that there remain significant barriers limiting the ability of LGBTQI refugees to flourish in the UK. There are some positive signs within the results, but they are limited and mirror those identified in our 2013 report.

Many of the issues will be familiar to anyone with experience or knowledge of the UK's asylum and refugee system. However, it seems clear that members of the LGBTQI community are particularly at risk. Their LGBTQI identity adds a further layer of complexity and challenge which is not being adequately addressed.

It is hoped that the lived experiences and challenges described within this report and the recommendations provided will be considered by the various groups which they are aimed at, to guide and drive future change and improve LGBTQI refugee integration in the UK.



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