



Research Report

Amplifying Expert Voices: Testimonies of Homeless LGBTQIA+ People and Activists as a Tool for Policymaking

QueerNet is a project of Quore Association
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CONNECTING SPHERES:
STRENGTHENING CSOs AND NETWORKS
TO PROTECT GBV SURVIVORS IN ALL THEIR DIVERSITY.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1. Content

The issue of homelessness and housing precarity among LGBTQIA+ populations has gained increasing attention within European research and policy agendas, yet it remains insufficiently addressed in mainstream housing and social policy frameworks. Evidence demonstrates that LGBTQIA+ individuals are disproportionately exposed to housing insecurity, often because of intersecting forms of discrimination, socio-economic exclusion, and institutional gaps. This report contributes to this growing body of knowledge by providing a policy-oriented analysis grounded in empirical research conducted in four European organizations that host and support LGBTQIA+ people experiencing homelessness. A particular focus will be placed on the structural and intersectional dimensions of LGBTQIA+ housing support and well-being promotion strategies. The study was carried out through questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups both with shelters' staff and service residents or beneficiaries. This research details:

- A) The distribution of LGBTQIA+ shelters and the description of services offered to beneficiaries (target, mission and specific expertise) together with staff narratives on strategies to promote well-being.
- B) The direct testimonies and lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ people who experienced homelessness due to violence or discrimination.

Narratives paint a complex picture in which many strategies for promoting well-being are cited by LGBTQIA+ people experiencing homelessness as essential. In addition, community connectedness, self-expression, and self-determination are emphasized as important. Participants in the study also reported high levels of mastery, or a sense of control over and self-efficacy in one's life, and capabilities. This highlights some effective features of the services offered by shelters in promoting the well-being of their clients. Our report/overview will highlight the strengths of these services and strategies, as well as critical areas for improvement, reflecting on the importance of sustaining them and implementing good practices in the field.

1.2. Keywords

LGBTQIA+ well-being, minority stress, minority joy, LGBTQIA+ homelessness, intersectionality, housing policies, LGBTQIA+ support services, community-based shelters.

1.3. Objectives

The report forms part of a broader project designed to address LGBTQIA+ homelessness through a comprehensive and multi-level approach combining research, advocacy, and capacity-building activities. The overall project aimed to:

- Strengthen the evidence base for rights-oriented and intersectional policy interventions on LGBTQIA+ homelessness.
- Improve and harmonize support methodologies and housing interventions for LGBTQIA+ recipients across different national contexts. Developing guidelines and common operational procedures for the protection and promotion of the health of marginalized groups.
- Support advocacy efforts targeting European and national policymakers.
- Enhance the capacity of stakeholders, including service providers and civil society organizations, to respond to the specific needs of LGBTQIA+ populations.

This integrated approach reflects the recognition that addressing LGBTQIA+ homelessness requires not only empirical knowledge but also institutional change, policy engagement, and co-operation across sectors. The specific aims of the present report, focusing exclusively on the research component and systematic analysis of the empirical findings, with the intention of informing evidence-based policymaking, are to:

- Generate new, context-sensitive knowledge on LGBTQIA+ housing support across different European settings through qualitative and participatory research.
- Identify strengths and barriers in accessing housing and support services along with promoting well-being for this population.
- Empower LGBTQIA+ individuals with actual experience, and therefore, an understanding of housing precarity by valuing their direct perspectives as ‘experts by experience.’
- Contribute to the development of targeted and affirmative policy responses that re-center the voices and lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ people facing homelessness and intersectional discrimination. Highlight and promote models of action and good practices in reception and support services that are informed by survivors’ and activists’ perspectives.

1.4. LGBTQIA+ Homelessness in the EU Context

LGBTQIA+ homelessness is widely understood as a multidimensional phenomenon, resulting from the interaction of structural, systemic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors ⁽¹⁾ only partially overlapping with those of the general unhoused population. These include discrimination, family and community rejection, economic disparities, migration ⁽²⁾, and barriers in accessing affirmative support services, jobs and housing markets ⁽³⁾. Such conditions expose queer individuals to high levels of violence, exploitation, and *minority stress* ⁽⁴⁾ leading to increased risks of negative health and mental health distress and further reinforcing cycles of social marginalization. As emphasized in recent qualitative research conducted in Europe, housing pathways for LGBTQIA+ individuals are therefore shaped by the interplay between family dynamics, precarity, and weak welfare structures, resulting in complex and unstable trajectories. Consequently, their overrepresentation within the homeless population reflects not only individual discriminatory interactions but also the broader cis-heteronormative social order that continuously reproduces structural stigma ⁽⁵⁾.

To date, only a limited number of European studies analyze this phenomenon and dedicated housing services focused on the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals, investigating both reasons and barriers to shelters' utilization ^{(1), (2), (3), (6), (7), (8)}. In 2024, some attempts to record the services offered in Italian LGBTQIA+ shelters ^{(9), (10), (11)} led to the development of the P.R.I.D.E. project ⁽¹²⁾ (Preventing and Reducing Inequalities through Data and Empowerment, supported by ILGA-Europe within the No ONE LEFT BEHIND Program). However, a medium-long term strategy to make interventions effective and consistent is still lacking.

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- 1 Tubertini, E., Foschi, C., Gaboardi, & Lenzi, M. (2025). Services for LGBTQIA+ Individuals Experiencing Homelessness: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 35(5), e70173. <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.70173>
 - 2 Quilty, A., & M. Norris. (2022). Queer/y/ing Pathways Through Youth Homelessness: Becoming, Being and Leaving LGBTQI+ Youth Homelessness. *Housing Studies* (40) 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2022.2141204>
 - 3 Gottlieb, N., C. Püschmann, F. Stenzinger, et al. (2020). Health and Healthcare Utilization Among Asylum-Seekers From Berlin's LGBTQI+ Shelter: Preliminary Results of a Survey. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17(12), 4514. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17124514>
 - 4 The model characterized four types of LGBTQ+-specific stigma (experienced stigma, anticipated stigma, concealment and interiorized stigma), leading to social exclusion and negatively influencing one's health. (Meyer, 2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129, 674-697.
 - 5 Pettas, D., Arampatzis, A., & Dagkoulis-Kyriakoglou, M. (2025). LGBTQ+ housing vulnerability in Greece: intersectionality, coping strategies and, the role of solidarity networks. *Housing Studies*, 40(7), 1506-1524. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2022.2092600>
 - 6 England, E. (2024). 'It's Not Just About a Rainbow Lanyard': How Structural Cisnormativity Undermines the Enactment of Anti-Discrimination Legislation in the Welsh Homelessness Service. *Journal of Social Policy*, 53(2), 366-385. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279422000289>
 - 7 Norris, M., & Quilty, A. (2021). Unreal, unsheltered, unseen, unrecorded: The multiple invisibilities of LGBTQI+ homeless youth. *Critical Social Policy*, 41(3), 468-490. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018320953328>
 - 8 Sauvaire, J., & Stella, N. (2024). Down-and-out in Paris: being LGBTQ and homeless, a compulsory performance of gender and sexuality. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 31(10), 1327-1342. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2022.2128724>
 - 9 Costa, G., & Magino, S. (2021). Giovani LGBT+ senza dimora trovano casa. *Autonomie locali e servizi sociali*, 44(2), 317-332
 - 10 Demurtas P. & Peroni C. (2023). *Report di ricerca LISTEN LGBT+. Le strutture di accoglienza per persone LGBT+*. IRPPS. <http://epub.irpps.cnr.it/index.php/wp/article/view/298>
 - 11 Tubertini, E.; Carbone, A.; Santinello, M. (2023). Staff Members' Experience of Italian Shelters for LGBTQIA+ Homeless and Runaway People: An Exploratory Study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(13), 6214
 - 12 Tubertini, E., Morzenti, G., Roncalli, B., Penno, A., Lasagna, C., & Quore APS. (2024). *P.R.I.D.E. Policy Brief: Qualitative-quantitative study of the experiences of LGBTQ+ homeless individuals and the housing services to support them.* <https://www.quore.org/en/p-r-i-d-e-project/>

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights survey (FRA), which analyzed the well-being of LGBTQIA+ people in various European countries, is the main dataset that can provide rough estimates. Despite the challenge of defining and quantifying this complex phenomenon, it is estimated that 20% of LGBTQIA+ youth in Europe have experienced a prolonged or temporary homeless experience (average of 10.7 months), with transgender and intersex individuals making up to 30% of this population compared to the percentage of unhoused people within the general population (13), (14), which is around 0.1%-0.3% in the EU (15).

At the same time, a significant proportion of LGBTQIA+ homelessness remains hidden, taking forms such as inadequate, unstable or unsafe housing (i.e., living in conditions of discrimination or violence, couchsurfing or reliance on informal networks) which often go undetected in official statistics⁸. This invisibility contributes to the marginal position of LGBTQIA+ homelessness within policy agendas and undermines the development of effective interventions.

1.5. European Policy and Socio-Political Context of LGBTQIA+ Homelessness

Literature and organizations' reports on LGBTQIA+ homelessness are mainly based in U.S. contexts, where unsheltered (street) homelessness is much more widespread and visible. However, methodological and definition differences affect who is counted as unhoused and who is not (16). For example, the ETHOS typology for housing exclusion (17), does not just target shelters and rooflessness, but also temporary housing, reception and daily centers. For this reason, it is able to account for various forms of homelessness, including also the most episodic and hidden ones (that largely characterize the queer homelessness experience), making the figures a lot higher. The 9th Overview on Housing Exclusion (18) estimated a total of 1,287,000 people experiencing homelessness or housing precarity in Europe in 2024. The analysis developed in this report must be therefore situated within a broader European context characterized by increasing housing inequality and structural pressures on welfare systems.

Across the European Union, access to affordable and secure housing has become progressively constrained, particularly in urban areas, contributing to rising levels of housing exclusion and

13 FRA (2020). *LGBTI Survey Data Explorer*. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. <https://fra.europa.eu/en/data-and-maps/2020/lgbti-survey-data-explorer>

14 Ritosa, A., J. Shelton, R. Stakelum, B. Van Roozendaal, K. Hugendubel, and S. J. Dodd (2021). *Perceptions: Comparative Findings from a Study of Homeless Service Providers and LGBTIQ Focused Organisations About LGBTIQ Youth Homelessness in Europe*. FEANTSA, ILGA-Europe, True Colors United, and the Silberman Center for Sexuality and Gender at Hunter College. https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Activities/events/2021/Perceptions_-_Comparative_Analysis_Compressed.pdf

15 OECD (2024). *Indicator HC3.1. Population Experiencing Homelessness*, Affordable Housing Database. <https://www.oecd.org/els/family/HC3-1-Homelesspopulation.pdf>

16 Smith, A. (2015). Can we compare homelessness across the Atlantic? A comparative study of methods for measuring homelessness in North America and Europe1. *European Journal of Homelessness*, 9(2). ISSN 2030-2762

17 FEANTSA (2007) ETHOS: European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (Brussels: FEANTSA). <https://www.feantsa.org/ethos>

18 FEANTSA (2024). *Homelessness in Europe: The State of Play. In Report: 9th Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2024*. https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Activities/events/2024/9th_overview/Rapport_-_EN.pdf

housing insecurity. As housing markets tighten and welfare systems face increasing pressure, individuals already exposed to discrimination such as LGBTQIA+ people, encounter additional barriers in securing stable accommodations and accessing services (19), (20). This reinforces structural inequalities and further marginalizes queer individuals within both housing systems and broader social policies. Moreover, research highlights a context marked by polarization, democratic backsliding in some Member States, and the growing influence of far-right political actors and disinformation campaigns (21). The increasing visibility of anti-LGBTQIA+ narratives contributes to the normalization of discrimination (22), (23). At the same time, despite the severity of the challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ people experiencing homelessness, the phenomenon continues to be underestimated and treated as a politically contentious or ethically “sensitive” issue, rather than as a pressing human rights and social justice concern. As a result, policy responses often remain fragmented or inadequate, creating an environment in which equality-based approaches are increasingly vulnerable to being deprioritized or contested. These trends further intensify the urgency of addressing LGBTQIA+ housing exclusion and its crucial implications for queer populations.

Nevertheless, in the European context, and especially in Southern Europe, LGBTQIA+ homelessness remains understudied for a variety of reasons. First, targeted LGBTQIA+ homeless shelters and initiatives are fragmented and unevenly implemented across the European Union, mainly located in large urban areas, and often maintained by third-sector organizations (four of which constitute the partnership for the QueerNet project). Second, institutional frameworks remain inadequate regarding their integration into welfare systems (24). Third, the government requires data proving the need for LGBTQIA+ shelters, but accessing long-term, stable resources to obtain this data is challenging, since questions about sexual identity are generally not included in homelessness surveys (25) and the unhoused sector often relies heavily on religious charities. Consequently, when research is conducted, it is often project-based, non-systematic, and non-continuable, dependent on funding and the level of investment by local governments in these services and on the requests for proposals and advocacy initiatives of LGBTQIA+ and homelessness organizations (26).

In Europe, this research is typically disseminated by organizations in the form of gray literature, which encompasses project summary reports, working papers, and technical notes. For instance,

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- 19 ILGA-Europe. (2024). *The power of data: Addressing LGBTI homelessness in Europe*. <https://www.ilga-europe.org/report/the-power-of-data-addressing-lgbti-homelessness-in-europe/>
 - 20 OXFAM Italy. (2024). *Case negate: la questione abitativa LGBTIQ+ in Italia*. <https://connectingspheres.oxfam.it/case-negate-la-questione-abitativa-lgbtqi-in-italia/>
 - 21 Prearo, M. & Scopelliti, A. (2024). Framing populist radical right opposition to LGBTIQ+ issues: Lega and Fratelli d'Italia's strategies on social media. *Comunicazione politica*, 3(2024), 357–384. <https://www.rivisteweb.it/doi/10.3270/115246>
 - 22 Demurtas, P., Busi, B., & Daddi, S. (2023). L'ostilità vissuta dalle persone LGBT+ in Italia. Un'analisi delle fonti statistiche. *IRPPS Working Papers*, 1(1), 1–73. Recuperato da <http://epub.irpps.cnr.it/index.php/wp/article/view/292>
 - 23 Trappolin, L.; Gusmeroli, P. (2023). *Sfidare la norma. Discriminazione e violenza contro le persone LGBTQI+*. Padova University Press
 - 24 England, E. (2022). 'Homelessness is a queer experience': utopianism and mutual aid as survival strategies for homeless trans people. *Housing Studies*, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2022.2108381>
 - 25 Di Felicianantonio, C., & Dagkouly-Kyriakoglou, M. (2022). The housing pathways of lesbian and gay youth and intergenerational family relations: A Southern European perspective. *Housing Studies*, 37(3), 414-434. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2020.1807471>
 - 26 ILGA-Europe. (2023, March 1). *No one left behind: Addressing LGBTI homelessness in the EU*. <https://www.ilga-europe.org/news/no-one-left-behind-lgbti-homelessness/>

periodic reports by FEANTSA ⁽²⁷⁾ delineate both existing and new programs and research projects on LGBTQIA+ homelessness in Europe. These reports include insights, interviews by experts in the field, and “context” sections, specific for each country, to facilitate the creation of a network and shared operational guidelines. The reports contain a series of recommendations, including the establishment of temporary safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ youth, the promotion of activities aimed at prevention and awareness (e.g., inclusive training in social services), the provision of psychological trauma-informed support, employment mentoring and vocational training programs, the development of safe migration plans for LGBTQIA+ migrants, the promotion of life skills (e.g., language proficiency, savings accumulation), and the provision of legal and healthcare support ⁽²⁸⁾. In 2023, FEANTSA published the *LGBT Inclusion Toolkit* ⁽²⁹⁾ aimed at building safer low-threshold homeless services for the LGBTQIA+ community. These measures include the redesigning of shelter spaces to incorporate pride flags, visual cues, inclusion statements, accessible and gender-neutral toilets, and safe online spaces for queer people. Additionally, the recommendations call for a review of existing homelessness programs to promote more inclusive practices, such as diverse participation and hiring, gender-sensitive policies, dress codes, a code of conduct, services, gender-based segregation, peer-led groups, and referral systems. Finally, the guidelines advocate for LGBTQIA+ staff training and the development of a data collection system that assesses users’ sexual orientation and gender identity.

Overall, a significant gap exists between the scale of the LGBTQIA+ homelessness and current policy responses. This underlines the need for a structural and institutionally recognized approach to social and health services for LGBTQIA+ people that is lacking in Europe. Addressing LGBTQIA+ homelessness requires a comprehensive and coordinated policy response, including the systematic integration of LGBTQIA+ perspectives into housing and social policies, improved data collection and monitoring systems, the development of safer, identity-affirming and resource-oriented services and a sustained political commitment to equality and fundamental rights. The research presented in this report aims to strengthen the evidence base for policy intervention by providing an in-depth and intersectional analysis of LGBTQIA+ housing support services in Europe, highlighting promising and replicable strategies for effective support and giving voice to direct testimonies of LGBTQIA+ beneficiaries.

27 FEANTSA (2023). *Pride: Homelessness in the LGBTIQ Community*. European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless. Brussels. Retrieved from: <https://rb.gy/h5urpd>

28 FEANTSA (2017) *Feantsa 2017 Annual Report*. European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless. FEANTSA. <https://www.feantsa.org/en/report/2018/05/17/feantsa-2017-annual-report?bcParent=27>

29 FEANTSA. (2023). *LGBTIQ inclusion toolkit*. <https://www.feantsa.org/resources/lgbtiq-inclusion-toolkit>

2

OUR STUDY

QueerNet is a collaborative initiative aimed at addressing the structural and emerging challenges related to LGBTQIA+ homelessness across Europe. Building on prior research and intervention experiences (particularly the P.R.I.D.E. project implemented by Associazione Quore and the Universities of Padova and Turin), QueerNet seeks to advance knowledge, strengthen service provision, and promote systemic change in the field of housing inclusion.

QueerNet is supported by OXFAM ITALIA and Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini along with the program CONNECTING SPHERES: STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND NETWORKS TO PROTECT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE SURVIVORS ⁽³⁰⁾. Started in June 2025, six different European entities have been involved in establishing and consolidating a European network of organizations and shelters supporting LGBTQIA+ individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness (four LGBTQIA+ organizations, the University of Turin and FEANTSA). This network. They are engaged in fostering both the exchange of good practices and the development of shared methodologies for reception, support, and empowerment, while simultaneously strengthening alliances among services and advancing prevention strategies.

The research underpinning the QueerNet project adopts an intersectional approach, recognizing the complexity of LGBTQIA+ homelessness and emphasizes the importance of integrating multiple viewpoints, including those of service users, practitioners, activists, and researchers. The study was conducted in Italy, Spain, Belgium and Finland between September 2025 and May 2026 with an initial group of 44 people (15 staff people and 29 residents or beneficiaries) of four LGBTQIA+ shelter homes run by non-profit organizations.

- A) **CADAL – Belgium (Bruxelles):** A reception center dedicated to LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers, providing safe accommodations and integrated support services.
- B) **ToHousing – Italy (Turin):** A social cohousing project for LGBTQIA+ people (with different target groups) experiencing housing insecurity, offering differentiated pathways toward autonomy.
- C) **Sateenkaari-ikkuna – Finland (Helsinki):** An organization focused on the prevention of housing exclusion and support for queer people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, providing integrated accompaniment through the active involvement of experts by experience.

30 Oxfam Italia. (2024). *Connecting Spheres*. <https://connectingspheres.oxfam.it/en/>

- D) **Ahora Dónde – Spain (Barcelona):** An association providing shelter, emotional support, and family mediation, especially for young LGBTQIA+ people who are victims of discrimination and family rejection.

The collection of data was coordinated and conducted by Dr. Elena Tubertini (psychologist, PhD) and Dr. Camilla Lasagna (psychologist, research fellow at the University of Turin, CIRSDe). Both have strong expertise in gender, discrimination, and social marginalization, ensuring methodological rigor and ethical sensitivity.

The methodological framework is grounded in existing scientific literature and reflects a commitment to ethical, affirmative, and evidence-based research. The study design incorporates qualitative and participatory methods to understand lived experiences, organizational practices, and systemic challenges. These methods have been confirmed by the literature to be the most appropriate for researching these populations. The methodology includes the following tools, all of which have been administered in person.

2.1. Self-Administered Questionnaire (Beneficiaries of LGBTQIA+ Homelessness Services)

The questionnaire was self-administered in *safer* spaces of the project's partner structures, in a confidential manner, in the presence of the psychological researcher to facilitate the compilation in case of doubts or questions. The questionnaire measured four main areas:

AREA 1 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION	■ Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation ■ Age ■ Legal Status ■ Physical Health
AREA 2 (ETHOS) EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS	■ Ethos Measure on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion
AREA 3 EXPERIENCE WITH SERVICES	■ Capabilities Promotion in the Service
AREA 4 PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING	■ Mental Well-being ■ Mastery

Area 3: Experience with services

- **Capabilities**, or fundamental skills, refer to a person's freedom to behave and live according to their own values thanks to resources at their disposal. This scale mea-

asures the level that the recipients feel the service promotes their *capabilities* (31). Questions regard the extent to which the service helped to promote optimism, safety, self-determination, inclusion and connection with the community: *‘Thanks to the support received from the program, a person can feel safe in the place where they live,’; ‘[...] having more control of decisions that influence one’s life.’*

Area 4: Psychological Well-being

- **Well-being** encompasses hedonic (happiness, achievement of pleasure, lack of pain) and eudemonic well-being (meaning of life, self-realization, self-efficacy). The scale, validated by Gremigni and Stewart-Brown (32), was composed of 12 positive statements regarding perceived mental health in the 2 weeks before the interview. Questions include: *‘I felt interested in other people’; ‘I faced problems well’; ‘I felt relaxed’*.
- **Mastery** refers to the extent to which a person feels they have control and mastery of their situation and life. This scale measures levels of *mastery* as validated by Pearlin and Schooler (33). Sample questions are: *‘What will happen to me in the future depends mainly on me’; ‘I can do practically anything I set my mind to.’*

2.2. Semi-structured Interviews (Beneficiaries of LGBTQIA+ Homelessness Services)

The interviews were conducted based on an outline and focused on experiences, strengths and obstacles related to the experience itself, investigating in particular:

- **Life story:** explore the life trajectory that led the person to access the service, including significant life events, experiences of homelessness, and relational experiences both within and outside the shelter/service context.
- **Relationships and community connections:** examine the person’s social support networks, relationships developed within the service, and connections with the wider community. Explore how the service contributed to the person’s well-being, autonomy, sense of agency and choices regarding their pathway, as well as their feelings of belonging and community connectedness.
- **Support and obstacles:** identify what worked well and what did not during their time with the service in supporting the achievement of personal goals. Investigate the key forms of support received, the barriers encountered throughout the experience within the shelter and related services, as well as the factors that facilitated or hindered progress towards housing stability, inclusion, and personal goals.

31 Greenwood, R. M., O’Shaughnessy, B. R., Manning, R. M., Vargas Moniz, M. J., Sacchetto, B., & Ornelas, J. (2023). Psychometric properties of the measure of achieved capabilities in homeless services. *BMC Public Health*, 23(1), 93

32 Gremigni, P., & Stewart-Brown, S. (2011). Una misura del benessere mentale: validazione italiana della Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS). *Giornale italiano di psicologia*, 38(2), 485-508

33 Pearlin, L. I., & Schooler, C. (1978). The structure of coping. *Journal of health and social behavior*, 2-21

- **Hope and future perspectives:** explore expectations, aspirations, and plans for the future following the service experience, including perceived opportunities, remaining challenges, and sources of hope

A key methodological feature of QueerNet is the central role attributed to “experts by experience,” whose narratives contribute to both the analysis and the development of recommendations. This participatory approach aligns with contemporary models such as Housing First, which emphasize empowerment, autonomy, and the recognition of individual agency ⁽³⁴⁾.

2.3. Focus Groups (Staff of LGBTQIA+ Homelessness Services)

A focus group was created in each facility, following a structured discussion guide. The staff who took part in the focus groups acted as multipliers, bringing the content, expertise, and practices back to the broader team and extending the conversation to other activists.

The discussions focused on participants’ experiences, strengths, and barriers related to the experience itself, investigating in particular:

- **Professional perspective:** explore staff members’ views on the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of the service and to service users’ well-being, including interpersonal relationships, professional skills and resources, service characteristics, and connections with the wider community. Examine the tools, methodologies, and practices used in daily work, as well as the strategies adopted to support and protect staff well-being and team functioning. Explore how the service promotes users’ autonomy, empowerment, and well-being, the main challenges encountered in support pathways, perceptions of the outcomes achieved, and expectations for future developments.
- **Relational perspective:** explore relationships with service users and within the staff team, focusing on trust-building, collaboration, communication, mutual support, and organizational dynamics. Examine experiences of belonging, solidarity, and community building among both staff and service recipients.
- **Minority joy and community connectedness:** explore the role of positive LGBTQIA+ identities, collective resilience, and experiences of minority joy within the service environment. Examine how the service fosters a sense of safety, recognition, belonging, and connection to the broader LGBTQIA+ community.
- **Job satisfaction and service development:** explore levels of job satisfaction, perceived strengths and limitations of the service, unmet needs among clients, and suggestions for improving or expanding services. Examine what additional resources, interventions, partnerships, or organizational changes could enhance the service’s capacity to respond effectively to users’ needs and strengthen its overall impact.

34 Tsemberis, S. (2012). Housing First: Basic tenets of the definition across cultures. *European Journal of Homelessness*, 6(2), 169–173

2.4. Participatory and Reflexive Approaches

In addition, the project integrated continuous opportunities for exchange and collective reflection among partners, including workshops, roundtables, and networking activities. One of the tools used was a Service Survey Checklist administered to service coordinators. This tool, developed on the basis of good practices and guidelines from international scientific literature on working with LGBTQIA+ people experiencing homelessness, was administered to project coordinators and enabled the identification of the presence or absence of activities, intervention models, and key characteristics of the services being studied.

During the project's preliminary meetings, focus groups and task groups were organized with staff, activists and volunteers in the form of World Cafés to share common languages and tools, and to collaboratively work on the research toolkit (interviews, focus groups, Service Checklist, ethics committee and data protection forms). These activities helped to refine objectives and research questions so that they would be useful and relevant for all partners, while ensuring ethical standards and the use of respectful, shared, and inclusive language.

Logistical aspects were also discussed collectively, such as the identification of potential participants (e.g., the inclusion of individuals who had received housing counseling but not accommodation), the need for language mediation, the organization of travel and scheduling of in-person data collection, and the selection of appropriate and accessible spaces to ensure privacy during the research.

These processes were not only instrumental for data collection, but also constituted core elements of capacity building and the co-construction of knowledge.

2.5. Ethics

This project has obtained ethical approval by the Bioethics Committee of the University of Torino (Italy) with protocol number 0226174 on 27/01/2026.

3

HOUSING SUPPORT WITHIN THE QUEERNET NETWORK: DESCRIPTIVE DATA

3.1. Services, Average Stay and Target

The QueerNet network has brought together four organizations and shelters operating across Europe, with a consolidated experience in the LGBTQIA+ housing sector ranging from 3 to 8 years (average experience of 6 years). While two organizations (ToHousing and CADAL) provide direct housing solutions, the other two partners (Ahora Dónde and Sateenkaari-ikkuna) do not offer accommodation facilities but deliver a broad range of complementary support services. These include housing counseling, peer support activities, awareness-raising about LGBTQIA+ housing challenges, and the coordination of innovative solutions such as voluntary foster home programs.

Overall, the two housing programs combined currently offer a total operational capacity of 54 beds, of which approximately 50 are currently in use. Access to accommodation is generally guaranteed after a few days (4-5 days), up to 1-2 weeks after the initial contact with the program. Emergency housing, although not always formally structured, normally has a minimum duration of around one month. Longer-term support pathways are the norm, with an average length of stay between 8 and 10 months, and a maximum duration of up to 2 years, yet remaining for the full period is not required. Housing arrangements also differ depending on the structure, but most consist of shared apartments, with double rooms and small co-housing units hosting up to 6 residents. In terms of service delivery, two housing facilities ensure the daily presence of staff, while others operate on a semi-autonomous model where residents manage the living space independently. In all cases, however, regular staff visits are scheduled to support individual experiences, monitor well-being, and facilitate cohabitation dynamics.

Eligibility criteria vary across services and are primarily determined by resource availability and organizational capacity. All services exclusively support adults (18+). The majority of beneficiaries are younger individuals: 61% are under 25 years old, and 21% are between 25 and 35. While two services also target individuals over 35, this group represents a smaller proportion overall (17.5%). In terms of background characteristics, 60% of beneficiaries speak the national language of the country in which the service is located; however, a slightly higher proportion (54%)

originates from a foreign country. Among migrant recipients, the most represented regions of origin are the SWANA (Southwest Asia and North Africa) region (20%), South America (13%), and other EU countries (9%).

Regarding gender identity, an average of 53% of service users identify as trans* or non-binary, 26% as cisgender men, and 16% as cisgender women. In terms of sexual orientation, on average 39% identify as gay, 23% as lesbian, and 20% as bisexual or pansexual.

Demand for services is significant: in the past year, the network received an average of 30 housing requests (ranging from 18 to 52). On average, 64 individuals were supported in relation to housing needs (with a considerable variation, from 3 to 200), while 37 people on average were referred to external services where direct support could not be provided. Data on long-term follow-up and continued contact with former beneficiaries is currently not available. All organizations that took part in the study are located in large European cities. While this may be partly explained by population density and the concentration of specialized services in urban centers, it may also reflect the greater visibility and institutional connectivity of organizations operating in major cities, particularly in relation to advocacy and fundraising opportunities.

3.2. Socio-Demographics of the QueerNet Services Beneficiaries

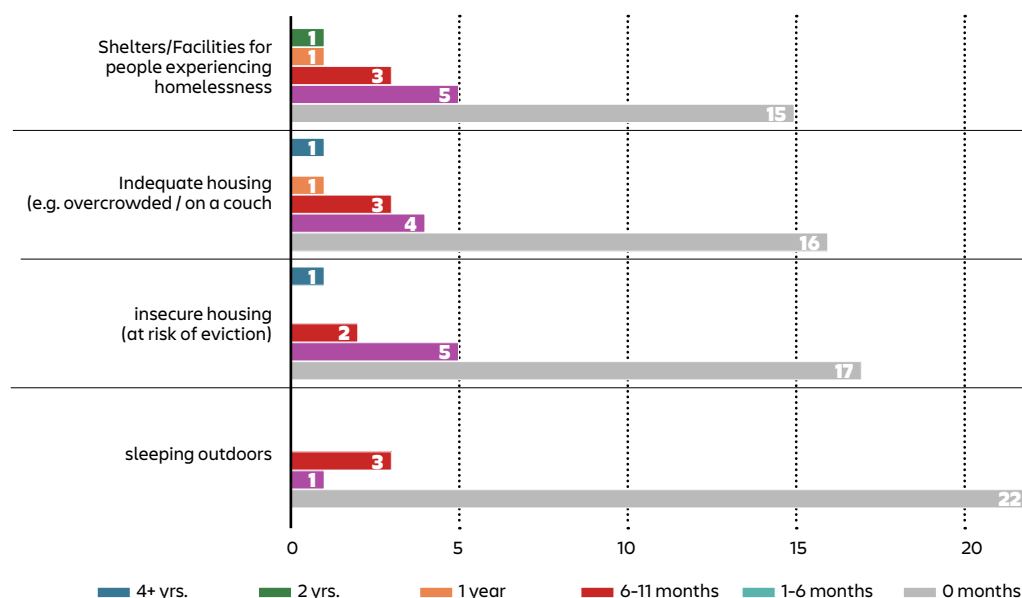
As underlined above, the population that has access to queer homelessness services in the QueerNet network is multifaceted and heterogeneous with respect to various aspects: age, sexual identity, geographical origin, socioeconomic status, legal status, level of education. Moreover, this population shows characteristics and needs that are not only related to their gender identity or sexual orientation but intersect with them. The aim of this section is to illustrate the complexity of the sample as much as possible. A total of 26 participants completed the questionnaire, 17 of whom were still experiencing precarious housing situations during the data collection phase. Among participants, nine people reported that they had already concluded their involvement with the LGBTQIA+ homelessness support program and were currently living independently (four in private residences and five in shared accommodations).

Although the questionnaire was translated into English and participants generally reported a good level of proficiency in the language, completing it may nevertheless have posed challenges for some respondents, potentially affecting the depth and accuracy of their answers. Furthermore, participation may have been limited, not only by language-related barriers but also by the impact of traumatic and post-traumatic experiences. These circumstances can make engaging with research activities, reflecting on personal experiences, or recounting difficult life events particularly demanding.

As shown in [FIGURE 1](#), people who took part in the research had experience in different precarious living situations **before arriving at one of the LGBTQIA+ shelters or organizations** involved in the project, with different durations of the period of housing insecurity. Most people (42%) had previously stayed in other shelters or facilities for people experiencing homelessness. A high percentage of people reported having lived in inadequate housing (36%) or in insecure or unsafe housing at risk of eviction or violence (28%). Only three people reported sleeping outdoors,

which underlines again that queer homelessness is mostly an invisible phenomenon if we only consider people sleeping in the streets.

FIGURE 1
‘How long have you spent in each of these situations?’ (ETHOS)



Even if the majority of people reported being homeless for shorter period of times, a consistent percentage of participants (48%), still reported being homeless for periods ranging from 6 months to 1 year. This is a worrying fact, as long-term homelessness risks compromising not only personal and interpersonal resources, but also the feeling of control in one’s own life, hope for the future, self-determination and well-being.

As for participants’ birthplace and legal status, data in FIGURE 2 and FIGURE 3 show how **only half** of the participants come from EU countries and have EU citizenship. While some people have a temporary or permanent residence permit, **one of every three** participants is a refugee or asylum seeker for reasons connected to their sexual orientation or gender identity. This indicates a clear overrepresentation compared to the general population, since migrants account for roughly 10–11% of the EU population (about 94 million people) (35), while refugees and asylum seekers represent a much smaller share (around 1-2% combined) (36). This highlights how the intersection of migration status and LGBTQIA+ identity can significantly impact marginalization and homelessness.

35 International Organization for Migration. (2026). World migration report 2026: Europe chapter. <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/what-we-do/world-migration-report-2026/chapter-3/europe>

36 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2024). Europe figures at a glance 2023. <https://www.unhcr.org/europe/europe-figures-glance-2023>

FIGURE 2
Birthplace

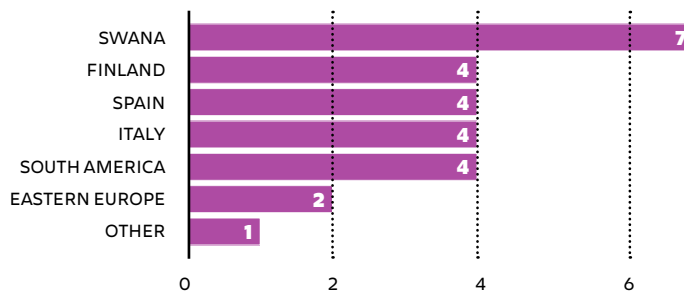


FIGURE 3
Legal Status

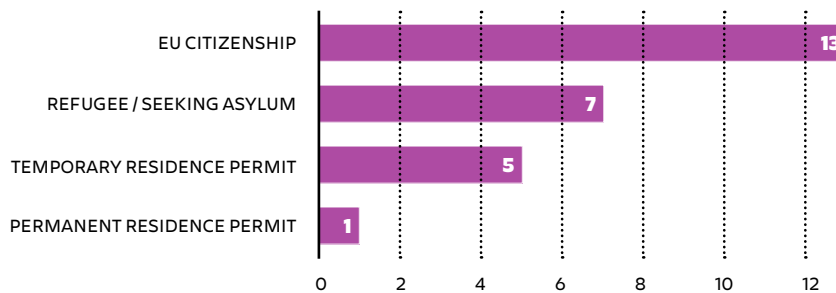


FIGURE 4 and FIGURE 5 show that the most represented sexual orientations are gay (35%) and bi+ (37) (19%), while more than half of the participants self-identify as trans* or nonbinary, genderfluid or agender (52%).

This mirrors EU data, showing an overrepresentation of trans* and non-binary individuals experiencing housing insecurity, and could be due to the fact that trans* people cannot always resort to *passing* (concealing their identity in unsafe situations), especially in social services. Having documents in which the registered gender does not correspond to one's gender expression (the way of presenting oneself, dressing, etc.) can expose one to increased discrimination in the workplace, or access to housing and health services. Furthermore, trans* and non-binary people often encounter services that are not equipped for their needs (division of spaces, correct language, medical and psychological assistance, gender affirmation paths). Therefore, they may be more inclined to seek specific, culturally sensitive and trained services.

37 Bi+ is an umbrella term used to describe individuals who experience emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to more than one gender. It encompasses a wide range of plurisexual/multi-gender attracted identities, including bisexual, pansexual, fluid, and queer people. (American Psychological Association. *Understanding bisexuality*. <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/bisexual>)

FIGURE 4
Sexual Orientation

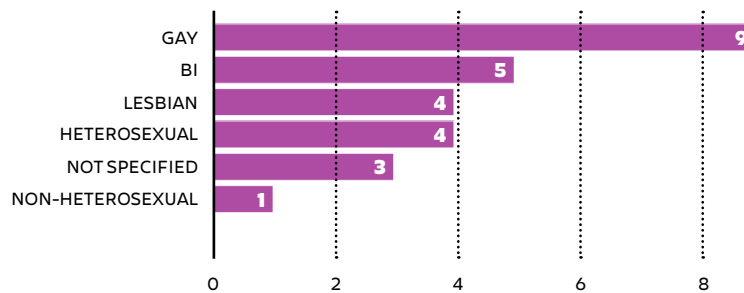
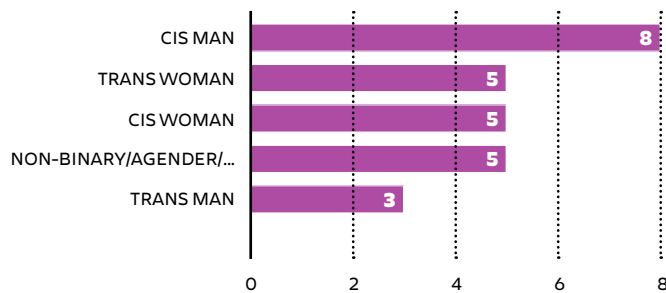


FIGURE 5
Gender Identity

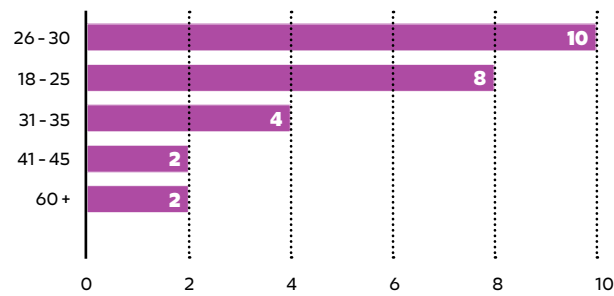


Finally, as shown in [FIGURE 6](#), **almost 70% of participants are very young, between 18 and 30 years old**. This figure is even more relevant when compared to the unhoused EU population (whose average age is around 45–54 years, with roughly 40–60% over 40) [\(38\)](#). This is in line with international literature showing how LGBTQIA+ homelessness disproportionately impacts youth, who are significantly overrepresented among the LGBTQIA+ homeless population compared to the broader European homeless population [\(39\)](#). It should also be noted that, as stated in [PARAGRAPH 3.1](#), most services involved in QueerNet target LGBTQIA+ people aged 18–26.

38 Taylor, O., Loubière, S., Tinland, A., Vargas-Moniz, M., Spinnewijn, F., Manning, R., Gaboardi, M., Wolf, J. R. L. M., Bokszczanin, A., Bernad, R., Kallmen, H., Toro, P., Ornelas, J., & Auquier, P. (2019). Lifetime, 5-year and past-year prevalence of homelessness in Europe: A cross-national survey in eight European nations. *BMJ Open*, 9(11), e033237. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2019-033237>

39 Shelton, J., Stakelum, R., & Dodd, S. J. (2020). LGBTQ youth homelessness in Europe: Findings from a survey of FEANTSA membership organisations. FEANTSA

FIGURE 6
Age



With respect to general health conditions and diagnoses, **19%** of the surveyed beneficiaries reported the presence of addictions and substance use disorders. Additionally, one in five reported experiencing health concerns primarily related to anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and chronic pain. Four individuals have reported being neurodivergent.

4

WELL-BEING PROMOTION IN LGBTQIA+ HOUSING SUPPORT SERVICES: TESTIMONIES AND VOICES FROM BENEFICIARIES

This section will include testimonies from the recipients of LGBTQIA+ homelessness support services included in the study. Where relevant, quotes from the semi-structured interviews with LGBTQIA+ individuals will be included, along with identifying details when useful. The names used are fictitious.

4.1. Diverse Pathways, Shared Needs and Resources

Across the different analyzed contexts, common patterns can be observed. While individual trajectories leading to homelessness vary depending on many factors (including age, gender identity, social support and socio-political contexts), LGBTQIA+ individuals share structural and overlapping, intersectional needs. Entry into queer shelters or reaching for specialized queer homelessness services is rarely the result of a single factor; rather, it reflects the convergence of multiple exclusion mechanisms. Although literature tends to prioritize interpersonal causes of discrimination, such as family rejection, this initial segment of the findings shifts the focus to examine these causes alongside structural causes of LGBTQIA+ homelessness, as well as intersecting factors such as migration, the labor market, the housing market, and legal barriers that contribute to discrimination and marginalization. The objective is to present a comprehensive and nuanced portrayal consistent with the participants' statements. The interviewees' accounts did not reveal a dominant pattern regarding the factors contributing to the marginalization of the queer community, but described, instead, a very complex and multifaceted reality.

4.2. Structural Discrimination and the Eternal Loop of Queer Homelessness

The intersection of diverse needs and experiences leads to differences in the types of discrimination which impact disproportionately trans* individuals. Key factors of queer homelessness

include family rejection, particularly following disclosure of sexual orientation or gender identity, but it does not stop (and likely does not end) there. Discrimination is constantly shaped and refined by structural social norms that are reiterated and reproduced across contexts, as this non-binary person explained after having had to leave their parents' house:

[Talking about other trans friends] Everyone has really horrible family situations, and sometimes problems at work, too. The social norms making you feel bad about your body, making you feel like people are out there constantly defining who you are every day [...] In the end, we trans people were beating ourselves up every single day of our lives, just being treated as the wrong gender... that alone is enough to drive you crazy. All day long, your whole life, some people are really struggling. And when even your own parents don't call you by your name, well, obviously, that's really hard.*

[NON-BINARY TRANS* PERSON]

Losing support from the family of origin is one of the many conditions that lead queer people to experience high levels of stigma and to feel abandoned by different forms of social support and structures over time. When living in a society that does not accept you is the everyday norm/is the default way of life, the family and close circle of relationships can become an invaluable form of support. However, if this also ends up missing, there is very little left outside. In this sense, the causes of queer homelessness are more structural than merely relational.

Building on these structural conditions, the situation is further complicated by migration and asylum experiences, which often intersect with legal insecurity and limited housing access. Discrimination does not operate only at the level of family and immediate social networks but is reiterated across institutional and material conditions. Most rental contracts, for instance, require formal employment, which can be difficult for queer homeless individuals to obtain (and especially for trans* people, who often report challenges related to the legal recognition of their gender identity or difficulties securing a rental contract while doing sex work). Without support or specific help, navigating the complexity of asylum seeking as a queer person can be particularly challenging, as this trans* woman explained:

I needed to get involved in a project because I didn't want to do sex work anymore. I wanted to find a job, and I realized that as a migrant, it's very difficult to find a job with a contract. It's such a mess. I left my country [in South America] to have a dignified life as a transgender person... I was living in an off-the-books rental while working as a sex worker... and [now I know] that here you can apply for asylum just like that, without a legal place of residence to submit on the commission's form [...] You can even apply for asylum when you arrive at the airport. I know that now, but when I first arrived, it wasn't like that. It would have been hard on my own. They wouldn't let me file an asylum application at the police station. The whole system is designed to make it hard for you to get asylum. If you're on your own, how are you supposed to manage?

[TRANS* WOMAN]

Legal barriers also frequently result in individuals being trapped in cycles of exclusion, even in situations where there is no overt discrimination or inadequacy of social services. In such cases, the issue is not a lack of willingness on the part of the services to provide assistance; rather, the proposed solutions are frequently unfeasible due to legal restrictions. For instance, some beneficiaries reported not being eligible for the *minimum income benefit* unless they fall within specific exceptions, such as proven vulnerability (e.g., abusive family environment) in which case certain requirements (e.g., proof of prior independent living) may be waived. In cases involving abuse, applicants may need to provide evidence such as a police report, a court protection order, or documentation from social services. However, even when parents engage in discriminatory behavior, LGBTQIA+ youth may hesitate to report or take legal action against them. This reluctance stems not only from ongoing material support, but in some cases also from sustained hopes and expectations for family mediation. Therefore, when the family of origin remains a young person's primary source of support (as is the case in many Southern European countries where welfare is largely family-dependent), and external services fail to meet the specific needs of queer individuals, youth describe experiencing a sense of "*perceived dependency*," a lack of emotional support from their family while fearing the loss of their only financial safety net. In this picture, the difficulties in accessing stable or formal employment can prevent young queer people from achieving financial autonomy and therefore independence from their families. This can reinforce existing household conflicts without an opportunity for release, emotional outlets or strategic exits, sustaining a cycle of tension between personal authenticity and material security.

I started my journey with my partner, and it was like I knew it was coming to an end, you know? If the relationship ended, I'd be homeless. Or, for example, when I was with my mom and went through the [gender affirmation] process, I knew I was doomed... but if I didn't do what I wanted to, I'd still end up homeless, you know? [...] If it wasn't my mom, it was my girlfriend, I was always tied to a woman, tied to surviving toxic relationships. Necessity makes you stay there. If I didn't have that necessity, and something bad happened, I'd have left. If you have somewhere else to go, it's fine; if you don't have anywhere else to go... you're stuck.

[TRANS* MAN]

A recurrent pathway is represented by forms of hidden homelessness (insecure, unstable or unsafe accommodations), which are often characterized by the absence of legal contracts, the practice of couchsurfing, a lack of protection and stability, the cis-heteronormativity of the housing market and offers, or an adverse climate in co-living situations, as this young person explained:

I'm in this situation [family rejection], and there have also been problems with my roommates. I'm looking for another apartment, but everyone tells me, 'Not here-we only want guys,' or 'We only want girls'... All the apartments are either for 'girls' or 'guys'. So, obviously, I'll end up living under a bridge...

[NON-BINARY TRANS* PERSON, 23]

These trajectories reflect a multi-level vulnerability framework, where structural, social, and individual factors reinforce one another.

4.3. Well-Being Between Needs and Resources

The effects of homelessness extend far beyond material conditions, taking the form of a cumulative and multidimensional process. The intersection between minority stress and housing precarity produces significant psychological and social consequences, resulting in a state of continuous anxiety and perceived instability due to the emergency circumstances. This stress was described by participants as a chronic sense of tiredness:

I was really sleepy; it was like I was stressed, and my sleep was very fragmented. I'd fall asleep, then wake up and worry about what the day had in store for me, what was going to happen next. [TRANS* WOMAN]

Beneficiaries' testimonies underlined the need to address unresolved trauma and chronic psychological distress, such as experiences of family rejection, that had not been addressed until they entered the LGBTQIA+ shelter or received adequate specialized support. Individuals describe how, in emergency situations and due to the absence of a stable and safe environment, they were overwhelmed with the immediate need to survive, leaving them with no available energy or time to address other needs.

I've just managed to move out of [my parents' house], and now I have to come to terms with everything that's happened, so I don't know... I'm in a better situation now, but of course, I'm still carrying all that trauma with me. [TRANS* PERSON]

Many testimonies described how prolonged exposure to precarious conditions or forced displacement has resulted in the loss of personal and social capabilities, well-being, dignity, self-efficacy, and hope, described as a '*feeling of drowning and being lost*'. Some people reported a prevalent sense of helplessness, stemming from the inability to have their skills recognized, the rigidity of the legal system, or the absence of viable prospects.

At that time, I was really, really not myself. I didn't have any contact with my family. I did not know what to do. And I did not have work. Really, I was confused a lot, a lot! [GAY MAN]

According to the participants' reports, personal autonomy was frequently compromised, particularly due to the premature exit from support networks or familial homes. Rejection or discrimination often occurred before the development of the necessary resources for independent living. This transition often resulted in individuals confronting a novel situation, marked by the challenges of economic independence, as a young queer person said:

I didn't have any clear goals because, at that time, I was not really sure how I could help myself or what it would be like, since I'd never done it before [...] The truth is, you feel

alone and it all seems overwhelming, you know? In the end, I got discouraged because I didn't get any job interviews. They'd say, 'Yeah, we'll call you later,' but nobody ever did.

[GAY MAN]

4.4. Minority Joy, Authenticity and Community Connection

Narratives also highlight several key support networks and resources for well-being that are particularly significant for LGBTQIA+ individuals experiencing homelessness. The presence of meaningful interpersonal connections, both within and outside the queer community, can offer a secure environment even in moments of emergency, providing both emotional and material support such as couchsurfing or guidance regarding specialized services. This is particularly relevant given the lack of awareness among most people regarding these resources, or the fact that queer people may not see themselves as 'homeless' and may need external guidance to recognize they need specific help.

Participants also tended to describe well-being as authenticity (understood as the ability to express one's identity freely with oneself and others). It was often underlined that coming out and being 'more themselves' may have disrupted their lives at first, but also eventually helped them select a more limited social circle of partners and friends over time. This tendency seems to emerge following a prolonged period of marginalization and hardship, during which people may prioritize the maintenance of more genuine relationships:

When I openly shared my gender affirmation path, daring to get to know people romantically, I had good experiences I would never have had if I hadn't [come out]. Meeting important people in my life has been crucial because if I'd never stepped out of my comfort zone, I'd never have discovered what I truly liked, I'd have ended up not getting to know anyone at all, and now I can say who I am and express myself with that freedom. Coming out also brought me something very beautiful: the friendships of those who have stayed by my side, it gave me the chance to see who truly cares. Now I have more meaningful friendships.

[TRANS* MAN]

Individuals in the LGBTQIA+ community are regarded as a valuable resource, particularly when they have shared similar experiences:

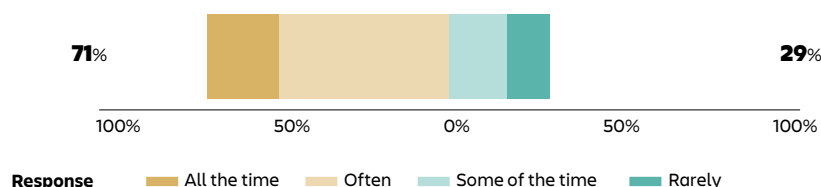
My trans friends are a real wonder, I love them so much. The relationship really is wonderful [...] Of course, if someone who's also trans understands you, well, that's always better.*

[NON-BINARY PERSON]

These results reflect some of those from the mental well-being scale (see [FIGURE 7](#)), showing that relationships (both within and outside the LGBTQIA+ community) can provide emotional and social support, becoming one of the main sources of well-being for queer people experiencing

homelessness. 71% of respondents indicated that in the past two weeks they had often or always felt close to others, suggesting that this population relies heavily on this resource.

FIGURE 7
‘In the past two weeks I’ve been feeling close to other people’



A recurring theme in participants’ narratives is feeling safe and ‘*free to be myself*’, especially in relation to one’s gender identity or sexual orientation, and not having to conform to norms. One respondent emphasized how being queer brought not only a sense of pride and gender euphoria, but also open-mindedness, playfulness, humor, and pleasure in breaking the rules simply by existing.

Sharing, dancing, being queer is like saying, ‘I’m being myself’. That moves me: no one can take that away from me. Even if it’s tough sometimes, I’m doing my best to be who I am... [Others] don’t struggle to find an apartment or a job, but we ask ourselves questions every day that maybe [cis-hetero] people never have: ‘Why do I like this? Why is my body like this?’

[TRANS* WOMAN]

These dimensions are deeply interconnected and represent core elements of both individual well-being and recovery trajectories, most of which are used by LGBTQIA+ support services and shelters to support this population.

4.5. The Transformative Role of LGBTQIA+ Homelessness Services in Promoting Well-Being

In the participants’ narratives queer housing services emerge as a transformative lever, functioning not only as shelter but as a platform for personal development and identity reconstruction. They act as a springboard towards autonomy, offering both stability and opportunities for empowerment. Several enabling conditions contribute to the effectiveness of these services.

4.5.1. Queer Community Spaces for Safety, Freedom and Authenticity

First of all, these services work towards providing stable and safe environments. Such a secure base does not only foster physical and psychological safety but also allows people to finally be themselves and feel at ease. Beneficiaries underlined that if they did not have such a space where they could be authentic, they would be forced to continue hiding.

About expressing my sexuality, it was not very open [before], not that normal [...] here I can experience it fully, without hiding. I can be more myself; I can relax about my identity. I can live it and experience it better without doubt or fear.

[BISEXUAL PERSON]

In the context of queer services, individuals feel welcomed and protected in a dedicated space, allowing them to live their lives, fully develop their potential, expressing themselves.

I didn't think I could have a dedicated space like this... Where I feel at ease, like at home. I mean, I feel at home. At home, yes, I would say.

[TRANS WOMAN]

Their initial encounter with queer homeless services is frequently characterized as a positive surprise, something they did not anticipate or feel they deserved. Some describe it as a sense of 're-birth' or 'being at home', fostering a sense of freedom, dignity, and personal pride that they had lost during periods of marginalization. Moving from what is imposed leaves room for alternative versions of oneself, space to explore, gain confidence and develop one's identity:

It was right at that turning point, when I joined the program, that all the tools, all the advice, and everything they did for me helped me move forward and develop my trans identity.*

[TRANS* MAN]

I feel that being in this organization gave me a lot of confidence in my queer identity and LGBTQIA+ identity.

[TRANS MAN]

This environment is present both inside and outside the service, where genuine bonds and a sense of a queer chosen family are formed among staff, volunteers, and other residents or service recipients. Indeed, one of the aspects that clients identify as effective for promoting their well-being is that QueerNet organizations offer not only physical spaces and opportunities, but also the chance to establish meaningful connections with other queer individuals. All services are designated as queer-only, except for some staff members, a feature that helps by providing a secure environment where people can be themselves and engage with others who share similar experiences. This is described positively by the beneficiaries, as it fosters a sense of connection with others, allowing them to share insights and challenges. Furthermore, being around queer people can instill confidence and normalize their experience allowing them to feel that there is more to their identity than just being queer, as this young woman explained:

When I first joined, my goals were to become independent and be able to present myself in a more feminine way without having to hide the fact that I'm trans. [...] Being in a place with so many LGBT people helped me be more myself—so much so that before, I was perhaps a little more self-conscious about being trans and maybe a little more afraid to say it, to present myself. Now I don't even think about it.

[TRANS* WOMAN]

The services also provide a social space for the sharing of recreational activities and community-based socialization activities.

We also have the last Friday of the month, there are parties dedicated to LGBT people. There, it is a moment of relaxation, we try to relax in a place where we feel safe among different people. So, that's where I find myself.

[TRANS MAN]

Queer homelessness support services therefore configure as social infrastructures that enable not only inclusion, but also active participation.

I would say the first thing that contributes to my well-being is being part of XX as a resident. It has helped me, and it still helps me, by giving me a sense of community. Since I've been here, I've met so many people, both the professional staff who work at XX and the other residents. I'd say the first thing, and for me a fundamental part of well-being, especially as a trans person, is not being alone. So, for me, that's one of the most important aspects, if not the most important; because when I was young I didn't know hardly any, like, queer people or LGBT people and my group of people who are LGBTQIA+ people I met through XX, or before that, and yeah we have like this... yeah I do have like a chosen family in that sense.

[TRANS MAN]

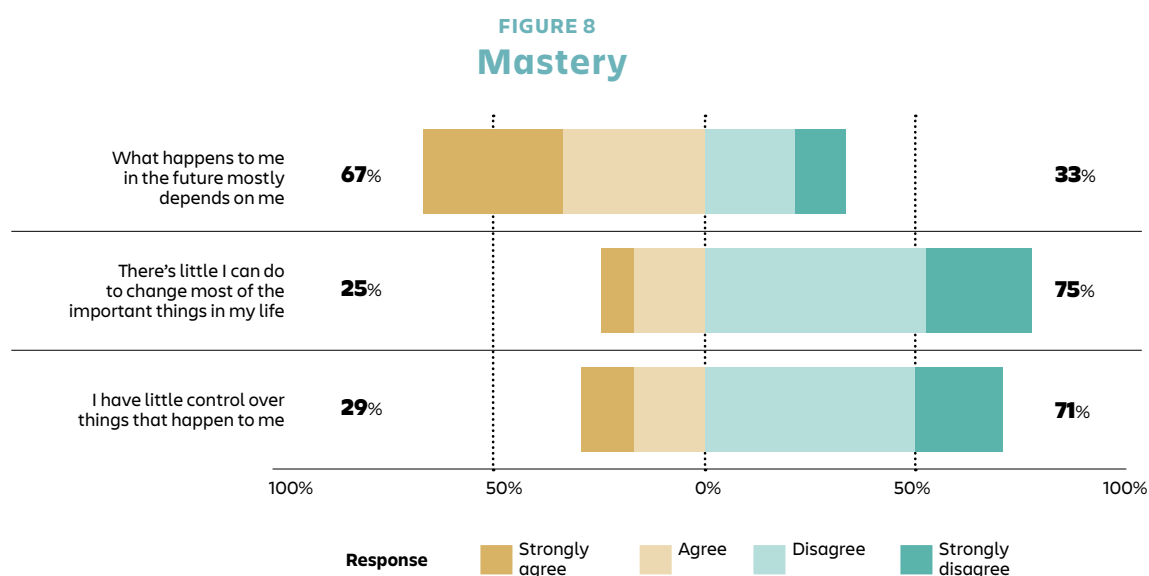
4.5.2. Fostering Capabilities, Mastery, Mental Health and Self-Determination

For young LGBTQIA+ people, especially for those who were rejected by their families, an important aspect of promoting well-being is described as having the opportunity to find tranquility, make choices, and regain agency and control over their future. Beneficiaries describe them as 'places where one can begin anew', and a source of relief, to 'rest a little bit' and take a break from the constant anxiety that often characterizes housing precarity:

Once I got here, I was able to have a slightly less stressful, deeper sleep. Obviously, there are always worries, anxiety and fear, but the opportunity the organization gives you, at least the chance to rest and have a place to take shelter, relieves some of the stress, brings

you some relief. Ever since I received help from the organization, it's not that my life is completely sorted out – nothing in this life is ever completely sorted out; but it's as if the tides and the waves have calmed down. [TRANS* WOMAN]

Interviewees said that an important feature of the LGBTQIA+ support services was that they were allowed to decide their own life trajectories, and that they felt supported and motivated by the staff. This is reflected in the quantitative scale results on Mastery (see [FIGURE 8](#)), which show how 70% of beneficiaries feel like they have control over their lives and futures.



High levels of mastery can positively influence the well-being and recovery process of homeless people, through which they overcome or live with the negative consequences of trauma (40). This is in contrast to the general tendency of these people to feel helpless and lose hope in their abilities and the future – conditions that participants attributed to the period before receiving support from LGBTQIA+ shelters or organizations. While these data do not provide any cross-sectional evidence, they may indicate that a path to empowerment and thriving from situations of trauma, discrimination, and marginalization inevitably involve building confidence in one's abilities and capacity to act (agency), as well as one's perspectives, all of which are things that QueerNet services work to provide.

The service has allowed me to see the problem from a new angle, first of all because of the freedom of mind, the freedom of expression. We are not constrained or subjected to

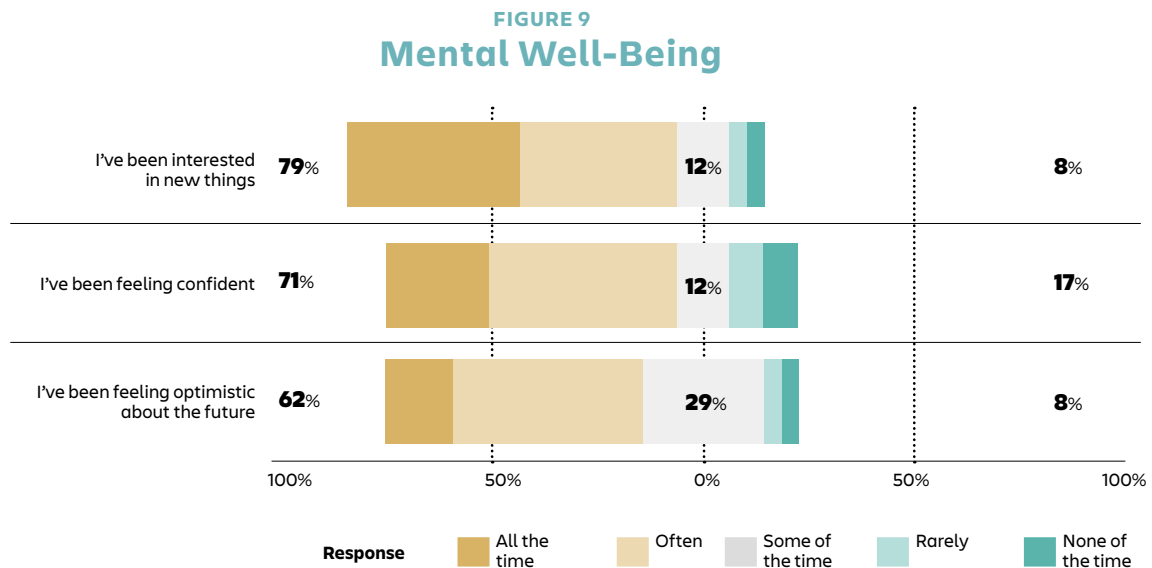
40 Manning, R. M., & Greenwood, R. M. (2019). Recovery in homelessness: The influence of choice and mastery on physical health, psychiatric symptoms, alcohol and drug use, and community integration. *Psychiatric rehabilitation journal*, 42(2), 147

certain requirements, or to be under any pressure. If there is a decision to make or to talk about, we always have free will, we always have the last word, so we don't feel forced into anything. [LESBIAN WOMAN]

Another salient factor contributing to the well-being of participants is the autonomy afforded by living independently, free from the constraints of dependency or the threat of abuse and manipulation. The reacquisition of agency over one's life, along with the pursuit of enhanced mental clarity, emotional well-being, and physical health, serves as a foundational element, because finally 'taking the wheel' of one's own life is the basis for achieving whatever life objectives they may have, as this young man recounted:

With my family I couldn't control what I did, they were controlling me... they forced me to marry a girl and that's why I left [...] I can choose, I can do whatever I want here, I'm happy I'm choosing my way. There are suggestions and opinions [from the staff] but I'm deciding. This is more important for me... now I'm driving. [GAY MAN]

FIGURE 9 shows some of the results from the mental well-being scale, showing that 79% of the interviewees have felt interested in new things over the two weeks prior to the research, 71% had been feeling confident and 62% had been feeling optimistic about their future.



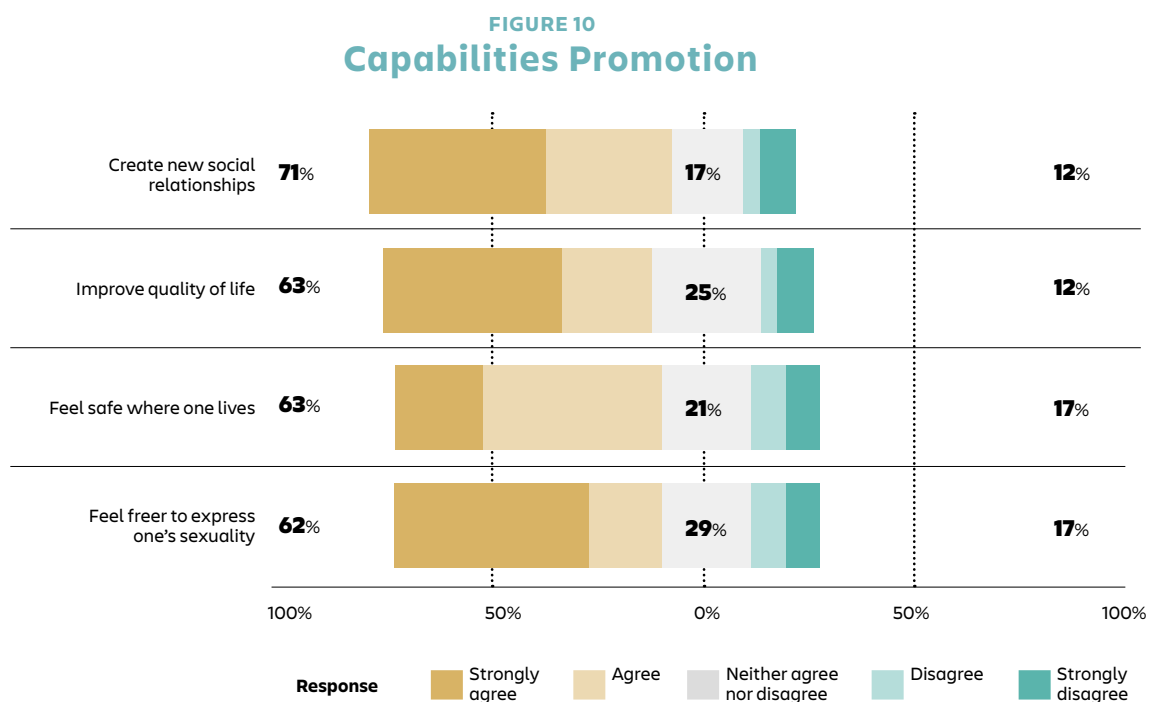
As posited by the participants, the ability to regain the capacity for dreaming and having hope for the future is intrinsically linked to the possibility of dignity and life itself:

I feel free for being a queer person [...] Because I don't know how I could get sober if I were in the closet. Because it's like rebuilding my identity and me again, and how can I do it if I have to hide myself? You need a safe base to build your life. [NON-BINARY PERSON]

One of the goals of the QueerNet homelessness services is to develop capabilities within the organizations. *Capabilities* are about the possibility of undertaking meaningful activities, of establishing positive and reciprocal relationships (sociability, conviviality) and the opportunity to realize one's full potential and personal growth.

There's no comparison at all between when I first joined the program and where I am now. They've helped me so much; I'm incredibly grateful to them. And yes, I mean, the quality of life I had when I started compared to where I am now, it isn't the same; it's so much better. [TRANS* MAN]

As shown in [FIGURE 10](#), when asked how the service promotes their capabilities in several areas, interviewees answered that the QueerNet services allowed them to create new social relationships, improve their quality of life, feel safe where they live and feel freer to express their identity – all factors contributing greatly to well-being.



4.6. What Makes Queer Services Different from General Homeless Services?

The practical assistance provided by the QueerNet organizations, as described by the users, is similar to the ‘*individualized autonomy plan*’ approach. All services (including non-residential ones) help with beneficiaries learning the local language, finding employment, continuing education or training, and developing independence. They also help with filling out paperwork and requests for benefits, filing asylum applications, transportation, and specific medical assistance or support for gender affirmation pathways (i.e., hormonal therapy).

I have access to healthcare, thankfully, here [...] recognition of gender identity, anti-discrimination laws, access to mental health care or hormone therapy. Often in my country you don't even have access to work. Now I feel lucky in that sense, here I can have access to these things because I'm protected. At least, I feel safer. [TRANS* WOMAN]

For residential programs, the type of support is comparable to that of Housing First because it prioritizes housing stability first, as opposed to other general services for people experiencing homelessness. Service users emphasize the importance of this aspect because, especially for this very young, queer homeless population, which lacks specific support or knowledge of general services and frequently needs rapid, temporary housing, it is not just about having a home (a fundamental need), but about obtaining it quickly without too many steps in between. This is necessary to rebuild a crucial foundation of trust, confidence and self-efficacy and to regain control of both independence and identity:

When I first arrived at the service, this was one of the first things I said: it was important to me to have a place, but also to be able to start looking for work and live my life as myself, without having to hide. If I had had to rent a room, I might have had to do so under a male identity, just to survive. Instead, this is essential for me here. [...] The way I see myself has changed as well. They helped me with a fundamental aspect of my self-esteem and in recognizing my abilities. [TRANS* WOMAN]

Another key distinction from general homelessness services lies in the specific training and competencies of staff within queer-focused services. These services are characterized by a higher level of awareness and expertise regarding gender identity, expression, and sexual orientation, enabling more inclusive, user-centered and responsive support:

I've never been to a [general homeless] shelter myself, but I wonder if the social workers there have been trained and have expertise in issues of diversity and gender identity... So, in my opinion, that's the first difference: the people working at the queer shelter are informed professionals who have been trained to understand different ways of being, different gender identities, gender expression, and sexual orientation. That's why, for me, we need a service like this, and it's important to have it. [TRANS* WOMAN]

Queer-specific services stand out, not only because of their specialized expertise, but also because they offer greater opportunities for queer people to find housing and protect themselves from other, non-specific services that would otherwise be dangerous.

There are shelters for women, for men... I was lucky they took me to a center for transgender people and not with men. That really is lucky, because otherwise it would be risky. And besides, there are also women in other shelters who belong to different religions, and they wouldn't want a transgender person with them either. It's dangerous... at least a trans person can find a home here.

[TRANS* WOMAN]

Service beneficiaries emphasize the importance of authenticity, both for feeling like themselves at home and because a visible presence in the neighborhood sends a strong message to the outside world and creates safe spaces. People state feeling *'less afraid to be myself'*.

As for the first point, the location, I think it's fantastic. We're right near the city center, [...]. So, when we're out and about, students and other people see us. In a way, that's also a way of saying, 'We're here.' Personally, I wouldn't like being more isolated, and it makes me wonder what would happen if we weren't.

[TRANS* WOMAN]

It's better to mix because other neighborhoods can also be open-minded about this because there are Muslim people living there too and I think they can say look we have an LGBT something like that. Maybe they will open up because, you know, Muslim countries are close about that. And I'm happy for it because we want to show them that we are LGBT and they will be a little bit open minded. We want that they are open minded.

[GAY MAN]

Relationships with staff are usually characterized not only by a professional user-staff dynamic, but also by strong, trust-based connections that resemble family-like ones. This has been described as very important, especially for queer youth who were undergoing moments of great change without any family support.

They supported me during my hormone therapy, they were there when I had my surgery and kept a close eye on how it went. It's been more than just professional support in finding a job... it's also been emotional support throughout the job search. They were there for me at every stage; it was important to me that someone asked not just 'How are you?', 'How are you feeling?', 'How are you doing after the surgery?' and also 'Has anything changed?' It was important to have someone I could share my experience with, someone who genuinely cares about me. From the very beginning... they're very empathetic people. That gave me the confidence to share my entire experience with them.

[TRANS* WOMAN]

While some service users would prefer to see more intersectional identities represented among staff members (as we will discuss in the following section), they do not consider it essential for

the staff to identify as queer. The ability to understand and actively listen, empathy, as well as the capacity to broaden the range of possibilities for queer individuals, is crucial:

In this type of queer reality, because we have like, this is specifically LGBTQIA+, I don't think that you need to be a queer person or a person who is in a sexual or gender minority. But you need to have, like, education about that and knowledge about that, of course. And in housing systems that are not only for queer people, I think it's still really important that there is at least a couple of people who have some sort of like education and understanding about that, so it is safer to search in there and come in there. [TRANS MAN]

For me, really, it doesn't matter. The first thing is to support me and not be homophobic. So that's all. [LESBIAN WOMAN]

And I think there should also be workers or volunteers who are in the community, or at least, like, very much allies with a big heart... Yeah, it's safe. [NON-BINARY PERSON]

Through personalized mentoring that acknowledges the unique challenges and strengths of queer individuals and their personal backgrounds, the staff of LGBTQIA+ targeted services can assist them in overcoming the fear of discrimination outside the shelter while also developing their authentic and true selves. Queer services staff can also encourage a more balanced perspective on the life of queer people experiencing homelessness. In addition, they can help build confidence in their self-worth, their resources, and skills to navigate, day-by-day, the feeling of helplessness.

In general, services for homeless people or migrants often involve constant anxiety experienced by the beneficiaries which is connected to the prospect of leaving the program. Service users describe how QueerNet staff try to manage this uncertainty amid precarious circumstances by striking a balance between helping people to not rely too heavily on the service and helping them to think about what comes next, while always bringing them back to the idea of a journey made up of different steps. People say that knowing it is okay to think about the end of the journey while also recognizing that they are here now and can see their progress with the staff's help is the most helpful:

I have learned that type of stuff in here so I feel that it gives, like, control that I can somehow avoid those types of situations or ask for help from those like, 'Hey can you come with me to look at apartment?' Also I ask my friends in here and colleagues for a lot of advice, like in situations that are kind of for LGBT people. [TRANS MAN]

At the same time, the findings highlight the importance of greater integration between queer and mainstream services. Clients of QueerNet services also appreciate the organization's ability to provide training to other agencies, fostering "cross-pollination" and integrated care involving multiple local services (i.e., strengthening knowledge exchange and capacity-building across organizations, so that expertise, good practices, and LGBTQIA+ competencies can be shared with other local providers, creating a more coordinated and sustainable support network).. Ensuring

ing collaboration and mutual training could allow individuals to access safe environments even outside of specialized shelters, reducing the risk of exclusion when queer services reach capacity.

If you don't get into a queer shelter, where do you go? Looking ahead, something that could start to become more seamless among the municipality's organizations and associations is for them to collaborate more [...] If there's no room at the [queer homeless service], they could send a LGBT person to this other dorm or association, and know they will be fine there, because they received training... For me as a trans person, that is important.

[TRANS* WOMAN]

4.7. Navigating Intersectional Living Environments: Balancing Structure, Complexity and Autonomy

Communal living environments within queer shelters present both opportunities and challenges. The coexistence of multiple needs creates complex intersectional environments, requiring careful management and flexible approaches.

Within the housing services, the autonomy of self-management fosters a familial atmosphere when there is a positive relationship among assisted people. In the absence of such a relationship, clear rules are essential for ensuring communal living. While the service may not always be experienced as a 'home', given the nature of the shared space, it is important to note that the rules and organized setting are usually not perceived as limitations by the beneficiaries, but rather as a form of protection. This is particularly salient given that homeless queer individuals have diverse backgrounds and characteristics, and the possibility to mediate, regulate relationships and resolve conflicts is crucial.

[Regarding] the decisions that have been made, I take into account all of my psychological follow-up, whether it is also with certain activities that are asked of us, to do the cleaning and everything, the staff will know if it has been done. We also have outings that have been proposed to us. Recently there was a concert with the XX and with an artist who had been invited. She came to sing to us [and play] the flute, there were quite a few people who attended this event. This reinforces the feeling that we are really followed by the staff and it proves once again that the staff are not alone in our journey.

[TRANS WOMAN]

Thus, the aim is to find a balance: clients emphasize the importance of having rules that protect others who benefit from the service, especially in shared living situations. Meanwhile, they also emphasize the importance of feeling free to choose and being supported in developing one's various identities as a whole (personal, professional, queer identity) by following one's aptitudes and strengths, as this young woman stated:

When it comes to my own decisions, what I want to study or how I want to dress, they don't interfere with that. As long as I get along respectfully with the other people and follow the rules, they [the staff] are happy [...] I've felt free and have been able to be myself. [The staff] tell us that we, as members of the community, have to be ourselves and do what we like without harming others. That's what, personally, has helped me to become strong, be myself, and keep moving forward.

[YOUNG TRANS* WOMAN]

Some testimonies highlight the challenges associated with limited choices regarding living arrangements:

For example, if I don't feel too much good with the guests in the same room, for example, and they won't change the bed. Apart from the more organizational aspects... for example, when it came to the apartments, I didn't really have a choice. They told me, 'You're going there,' and I think it was the same for the other residents. Basically, they said: 'We've decided that you'd be better off here with these people.'

[LESBIAN GIRL]

which in some cases – especially due to cultural differences and the first experience of living with strangers who have different needs – can have a significant impact. For example, this person describes their first encounter with a trans* person:

I am honest, the first time I was in shock. This was the first time I saw and lived with a trans person. [...] The second time I saw her, all I saw is a woman [...] Something changed. I accept everyone now. I learned not to judge. Maybe I didn't know what 'trans' was. I had not yet talked with them, know what their history was, their life story [...] Everyone has a hard life.

[LESBIAN WOMAN]

Another person described:

In the house, I was also the only White person, although that wasn't really the point. What I found difficult to come to terms with, for example, was the way people approached cleanliness. It was simply different – there was a different understanding of what keeping the house clean meant.

[GAY BOY]

In these cases, the greatest challenge is to prevent incidents of violence and discrimination within the LGBTQIA+ community itself – even within LGBTQIA+ services – which could lead to feelings of isolation. One of the mechanisms that responds to this need is that with time and appropriate mediation, the intersectionality and diversity of the environment can be seen as a positive factor.

We shared experiences, and I got to meet these kids from the [queer] community whom I didn't know before – there were Latinos, Europeans, Arabs – and I was able to see them,

get to know them, make some connections. I really liked it because it's like our own space, where we can be ourselves without people pointing fingers at us or staring at us. That's what I liked.

[YOUNG TRANS* WOMAN]

Indeed, residing or spending time in a diverse environment with individuals from various age groups and backgrounds is also seen as beneficial in several ways. Firstly, it facilitates the discovery of new worlds. Secondly, it prepares an individual for interaction with a diverse external world, thereby avoiding segregation and fostering an open mindset.

It's difficult because it's complex. You have to face someone else's reality, and it's very different from your own. But overall, it's good that you're all different.

[LESBIAN WOMAN]

The inability to feel at ease is also often caused by limited opportunities for personalization and an inevitable lack of control over the process of modifying or furnishing living spaces.

4.8. Challenges, Areas for Improvement and Recommendations

Despite their demonstrated positive impact, queer housing services face significant challenges. These hurdles are often not due to a lack of willingness to provide assistance. Conversely, they are caused by the need to operate under emergency conditions with limited financial resources. There is also a significant dependence on external factors, such as the political climate and grants, given that none of the services investigated are part of the state social services system. This often makes it challenging for service users to obtain assistance in purchasing essential yet non-reimbursable items (e.g., certain medications). Additionally, not all services are able to provide financial contributions, subsidies, or allowances to beneficiaries.

As previously mentioned, various forms of support are available, but QueerNet services may lack shelter or have a shortage of available apartments and rooms to meet the increasing demand:

They really do have a strong willingness to help. The problem is that they also lack resource., So sometimes it's clear they want to help, but they're a bit limited in what they can do.

[NON-BINARY TRANS MAN]

For instance, while sometimes the rules and constraints imposed by shared communal spaces and the living arrangements can contribute positively to well-being and promote intersectional environments, in other more difficult cases the introduction of single rooms has been proposed by beneficiaries as a possible solution to avoid conflicts.

Some of the people interviewed reported seeking information about other shelter programs in the EU, anti-discrimination laws, and the steps to apply for asylum in their countries. They reported that they sought this information not only to navigate the system themselves but also to

guide other marginalized queer people, whether acquaintances or people they met online, toward the most suitable support for everyone.

The shortage of resources inevitably affects service capacity and continuity. Many users have expressed a need for additional support, particularly in the areas of legal and psychological assistance, and in more complex cases:

Psychological support is also very important for trans people. For example, there was an Italian trans woman who lived at XX. She was dealing with a severe addiction, depression, and bipolar disorder, she was taking medicine in liquid form and a lot of different medications.

[GAY MAN]

I always think about young LGBTQ people, how people do self-harm and how they are being harmed. I always hoped that there was some sort of help center especially for young LGBTQ people, like teenagers in this time. I am really worried about their mental health because it feels that it has gotten worse. LGBTQ people are on my mind because when I was young, let's say 15 years ago, I didn't get the help that I needed and now I don't know what the situation is. So I would like for people to concentrate on that because young people are our future and minorities are the highest risk group.

[TRANS MAN]

This support would encompass assistance with paperwork and interaction with external services. For instance, they recommend training local police to report LGBT hate crimes and preparing better for program participants to respond to and manage any challenges that may arise after they leave the program. Additionally, it is crucial to address highly complex needs that vary over time and according to the situation, as well as the person's identity and background. This necessitates a very high level of complexity and expertise. Service users have identified instances where greater care is necessary to prevent misinterpretation or only a partial understanding of the issue.

It is essential to discern between short-term and long-term pathways. For some individuals, housing or support services represent temporary solutions aimed at restoring stability. For others, this process can be protracted and longer to address traumatic experiences and chronic health and mental health issues. Different pathways entail different needs and potential internal conflicts. It is also necessary to strike a balance between those who require more supervision and those who need more autonomy. This is because for some queer individuals, excessive staff supervision could evoke memories of past control or abuse, while others need more attention and ongoing assistance.

Still, concerning service organization and physical spaces, some beneficiaries emphasize that the visibility of the LGBTQIA+ service in the neighborhood should also be tailored to the specific area and the needs of the residents, as well as their characteristics and backgrounds. While for some people having a visible and recognizable space (e.g., hanging pride flags on the door) can be a way to raise awareness in the city and feel proud. However, in certain areas and for certain individuals, too much visibility can cause problems (neighborhood issues, being found out by parents).

For many young people, reporting their parents is not always a viable option. In some cases, reporting their parents does not guarantee that they will be able to leave home and may expose them to further danger. Moreover, doing so without psychological support is risky.

For certain individuals, such as trans* migrant sex workers, employment placement should address specific pathways rather than generalized ones for migrants.

Meetings and mediation tools, or the (often limited) hours of educational support, may not always be sufficient to manage. In addition, differences and conflicts often exist within the queer shelters. It is important to emphasize that people not adhering to the rules may pose a potential physical and psychological threat, not only to their own well-being but also to that of other residents. This can undermine others' sense of safety, of feeling at home and at ease, which is often hard-won and can be easily disrupted by a single triggering incident. For instance, it is essential to address substance use harm reduction in a systemic way, given the co-occurring issues it can generate if left unmanaged. Acknowledging these issues and not ignoring them is crucial, given the high prevalence of unhoused queer individuals with a history of substance abuse or other multiple coexisting conditions.

She would often come back drunk, and I think she was also using drugs. She wasn't following the rules, even though there are rules in the house. The staff were very kind and understanding with people who struggled to follow those rules, but I think those rules are really important. They were genuinely kind people and they didn't want to ask her to leave. In the end, though, she left and went to a homeless shelter.

[GAY MAN]

Therefore, a growing demand for enhanced entry-level assessment has emerged, particularly for complex cases. This is intended to facilitate proactive and preventive planning for integrated care services from the outset.

For some individuals, securing employment is of greater importance than the nature of the position. This is often driven by the need for immediate financial stability or the assurance of a lawful and secure contract, enabling them to rent their own accommodation. However, some people express a need for additional support in specific job searches, enhanced collaboration with employment agencies, and a deeper understanding and expertise regarding the distinct characteristics and requirements of various professions and educational backgrounds. It is important to acknowledge the varying needs to avoid a sense of limited self-efficacy, which may lead to feelings of alienation, with no viable options or clear paths to solutions.

As underlined in previous sections, social support is a significant factor in safeguarding and enhancing well-being. However, the recognition of its necessity can vary among individuals and over time. Service beneficiaries do not always find social activities useful or enjoyable, particularly when experiencing significant anxiety or concerns. Therefore, it is important to balance these activities with addressing urgent, practical needs (e.g., work, documents). In emergency situations, forming relationships or participating in volunteer or community activities may seem challenging and infeasible. Conversely, some residents expressed a desire to receive more information about ongoing social activities, indicating their interest in participating in social events and meeting others. They reported that, usually at a later stage in their recovery and autonomy

process, they considered this essential. Often at this point they finally had the energy and opportunity to “give back” to younger generations of queer people the help they themselves had received.

A particularly important theme connected to this is the limited availability of peer support and the lack of visible positive trajectories. Many people identify the role of “experts by experience” as crucial in providing more positive role models, hopeful narratives and alternative pathways out of homelessness. On the one hand, community connection is a strong driving force for well-being. On the other hand, having only friendships and relationships with people who identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community and attending support groups designed specifically for this community can lead not only to shared joy, but also to a profound emotional burden of shared hardship. As one person explained:

On the one hand, it's nice to connect with others to share stories, but they are all tragic... I'd love to meet a trans person who's managed to overcome it all and is happy, just a little hope... [Someone] who would tell me, 'You can get out of this even if your own family has ruined your life'. Because in the end, the people I know keep suffering. For me, it's important to know that I'm not doomed to live a life like this, that you can get out of it, you can be okay, not just better, but really okay...*

[NON-BINARY PERSON]

These interactions may also give rise to divergent perspectives and experiences. Participants therefore emphasize that affirmative spaces should be created to allow for critical thinking and freedom from social norms. These spaces should provide opportunities for deconstruction to help create new realities and more chances to stand out from the crowd.

Those rules make you feel bad about your body. They make you feel like people are constantly denying your identity every single day. That really wore me down because I didn't want to feel bad about my body or my identity or have to give up the name my parents chose for me just to be able to live. But in the end, I had to.

[NON-BINARY TRANS PERSON]

4.9. Aspirations and Future Perspectives

Key aspirations are comprised of both individual-level personal aspirations, including access to employment and education, and also ambitions on broader social and structural levels.. Despite the challenges faced, desires are often centered around the possibility of living a ‘normal life’, understood as the freedom to exist authentically, safely, and without any more fear or stigma:

For example, not worrying that this could end at any moment, that they're going to fire me, or that I won't be able to make it to the end of the month and won't have money to

pay for my room, or... that there's no one putting that pressure on me, like, 'If this ends, my home is gone' – It's the security of knowing that now it's just me, like, I have to be true to myself and not have to answer to anyone else. [TRANS* MAN]

And also, we live in the house, home, which is, like, our comfort space. So, in the short future, this is it... Nice, nice. [LESBIAN WOMAN]

My dream is that I feel loved and that I'm treated like this girl who lives with me and that my rights are respected. [TRANS WOMAN]

Participants also expressed a desire to assist all individuals regardless of whether they are queer and homeless. Most of them wish to continue providing support to others, also through research initiatives such as this one, collecting testimonies, monitoring peer feedback, and sharing stories, showing a real commitment to shedding light on this invisible phenomenon.

I hope that I can continue as an expert by experience, I hope that someday I will be in that type of position where I could educate other people or just work as a peer worker [...] because I have education as an audiovisual media person. I have dreams that I could write something or do some sort of audiovisual media, I work in social media, so maybe [I could] continue that. [TRANS MAN]

I love babies and gay people cannot have babies in Italy. They also cannot adopt and I want to build a community to protest for adopting babies for gay people. Maybe this can be if I marry, I really want to adopt a baby. If it's not possible, I will go to France to do this. [TRANS* WOMAN]

The interviewees emphasize their desire to be free and not dependent on anyone in their future. This freedom also involves the ability to express themselves creatively and authentically, in fact, many people mention artistic activities as an outlet.

[I hope that] I'll finish my course in dance; I wasn't able to do it in my home country, and hope has helped me a lot to become known and fulfill my dreams, through dance, and in letting my personality shine through. There are no limits; there's no red traffic light. 'No, you can't do that.' 'No, it's forbidden.' No, that's not how it's done. And that's what freedom is all about. [GAY BOY]

The ability to dream and imagine long-term futures is as a crucial ingredient of empowerment:

When you start this process, you're so focused on just surviving, on emergencies. You don't have time to dream; you just want to survive, you know? I spent many years just surviving, and I didn't have time to dream. And now that I've survived, I've found the time. I have time to dream. [TRANS* MAN]

5

STAFF PERSPECTIVE ON EFFECTIVE LGBTQIA+ HOUSING SUPPORT

Where pertinent, quotes taken from the semi-structured interviews conducted with volunteers, activists and LGBTQIA+ housing services staff will be included. To maximize participant anonymity while providing relevant contextual information, quotations are labeled only by interviewees' professional role and gender identity. These labels enable readers to interpret the testimonies considering respondents' personal and professional perspectives while preserving confidentiality.

5.1. Professionalization and Organizational Sustainability

Across the contributing countries, one of the most recurrent themes emerging from staff statements concerns the progressive professionalization of LGBTQIA+ housing support services. Participants highlighted how moving beyond exclusively volunteer-based models has contributed to greater organizational stability, improved service coordination, and enhanced capacity to respond to the complex needs of beneficiaries.

Staff members described professionalization not as a replacement for volunteer engagement, but rather as a complementary process that enables services to operate more consistently and sustainably. Having a dedicated paid staff was perceived as essential for ensuring continuity, coordinating activities, managing administrative and funding requirements, and maintaining long-term organizational development.

Having contracted a person who can dedicate eight hours a day to coordinating the different areas means that the goals we set become much more realistic than before.

[OPERATOR, WOMEN]

Similarly, participants insisted that clearer organizational structures help reduce uncertainty and strengthen commitment among volunteers. The presence of dedicated coordinators and defined responsibilities was seen as a key factor in reducing staff turnover and creating a more reliable support system for service users. Professionalization was also associated with improved access to funding opportunities, stronger relationships with external stakeholders, and greater insti-

tutional legitimacy. Staff reported that a more structured organizational framework facilitates involvement in larger projects and partnerships, while increasing the visibility of LGBTQIA+ housing issues within the broader social service sector.

I have the impression that each social worker has their own sensitivities. I think having something like this be interdisciplinary, people coming from different backgrounds, sometimes it provides specific lenses for looking at things, which can be surprising.

[SOCIAL WORKER, MAN]

At the same time, respondents stressed that professionalization contributes to healthier working conditions. By distributing responsibilities more effectively and establishing clearer role definitions, staff members are better able to maintain appropriate professional boundaries and avoid carrying the emotional burden of support work alone:

Clear roles are important. I have to know what my role is and what I'm doing.

[SOCIAL WORKER, NON-BINARY]

Overall, findings suggest that professionalization represents a crucial enabling factor for the sustainability of LGBTQIA+ housing services. Rather than diminishing the community-based ethos of these organizations, it appears to strengthen their capacity to provide consistent, accountable, and high-quality support while preserving the valuable contribution of volunteers and peer workers.

5.1.1. Working Step by Step: Individualized Pathways

A further element characterizing staff practice across services is the emphasis on gradual, step-by-step support pathways. Rather than pursuing rapid solutions, participants described their work as a process of accompanying beneficiaries through realistic and achievable stages of change.

The step-by-step approach was also linked to the highly individualized nature of support. Staff emphasized that there is no standard pathway that can be applied to every recipient. Instead, interventions are continuously adapted according to each person's circumstances, resources, needs, and pace of change:

We meet every week to understand whether we are doing the right thing or we need to change something. It depends on the person and the tools available to work with them.

[SOCIAL OPERATOR, MAN]

This gradual approach was viewed as particularly important in promoting long-term autonomy. Rather than encouraging dependence on services, staff sought to support beneficiaries in

developing skills, confidence, and resources over time. Progress was therefore understood as a cumulative process, built through small but meaningful achievements.

Overall, the findings suggest that working step-by-step represents a core methodological principle of LGBTQIA+ housing support services, enabling personnel to combine flexibility, realism, and person-centered care while supporting sustainable pathways towards independence.

5.2. The Strength of Teamwork and Collective Care

A second major theme emerging across all participating countries concerns the central role of teamwork in sustaining both service quality and staff well-being. Those surveyed consistently described LGBTQIA+ housing support as highly complex and emotionally demanding work, requiring continuous collaboration, reflection, and mutual support among team members.

I feel like this sense of community among us who volunteer or work in this organization. I also feel like we can, like, communicate openly with each other. [SOCIAL WORKER, NON-BINARY]

Staff highlighted that no individual professional can effectively respond to all the challenges presented by the clients. Instead, effective support relies on collective decision-making, the sharing of responsibilities, and regular opportunities to discuss cases and strategies. Team meetings, informal consultations, and peer support were described as essential mechanisms for ensuring consistency in service provision and reducing professional isolation:

We can support each other because basically we are all we have. [VOLUNTEER, TRANS WOMAN]

Similarly, the staff emphasized the importance of having colleagues who can temporarily take over responsibilities during particularly demanding periods:

Having a good team of colleagues that are understanding, that can give you a hand when needed, that can take over. For instance, if one of the social workers has a very exhausting day, another one can pick up the charge. This helps a lot. [SOCIAL WORKER, WOMAN]

Beyond practical coordination, participants described teamwork as an important source of emotional containment and professional learning. Working alongside colleagues with different backgrounds and levels of experience was seen as an opportunity to develop new perspectives and improve practice. Several respondents stressed that discussing difficult situations collectively allows staff to better understand complex cases and avoid making decisions alone.

The findings suggest that strong team relationships constitute a critical protective factor against burnout and contribute significantly to the quality and sustainability of LGBTQIA+ housing support services.

5.2.1. Managing Boundaries, Emotional Labor and Staff Well-Being

Across countries, staff frequently reflected on the emotional demands associated with supporting LGBTQIA+ individuals experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness. Participants described the need to balance empathy and closeness with the maintenance of appropriate professional boundaries. Many respondents reported that, particularly at the beginning of their careers or involvement in housing services, they struggled to separate work responsibilities from personal life. Over time, however, they developed strategies to protect their well-being while maintaining meaningful relationships with service users.

One of the most cited strategies involved establishing clear boundaries regarding availability and communication. A participant from Spain described the introduction of specific service hours as a crucial step in preventing staff exhaustion:

Before there weren't any specified hours. Now everyone knows when support is available, and that has been vital.

[COORDINATOR, MAN]

Similarly, participants stressed the importance of distinguishing between working time and personal time:

It was necessary to understand the need to distinguish working time from non-working time.

[SOCIAL EDUCATOR, WOMAN]

Respondents also emphasized the importance of recognizing personal and organizational limitations. Rather than attempting to solve every problem faced by recipients, staff highlighted the value of focusing on what can realistically be achieved while respecting the autonomy of service users.

Several participants identified supervision, peer support, and ongoing reflection as essential resources for managing emotional labor. As one Italian participant noted:

If you are not well, you cannot work well.

[COORDINATOR, MAN]

Overall, the findings indicate that staff well-being is not simply an individual responsibility but a collective and organizational concern. Clear boundaries, supportive teams, and opportunities for supervision appear fundamental for sustaining long-term engagement in LGBTQIA+ housing support services.

5.2.2. Diversity, Intersectionality and Representation within Staff Teams

A further theme emerging strongly across the dataset concerns the value of diversity and intersectionality within staff teams. Participants consistently highlighted how different professional, personal, cultural, and identity backgrounds contribute to a richer understanding of the needs and experiences of LGBTQIA+ service users:

If I may add, one of the strengths of our team is that everyone comes from a different background and has their own personal story. In a way, this is educational for us as well. We listen carefully to one another and to each person's particular perspective. We do not always share the same views, as is the case in any workplace, but what is important is that we have a common vision and a shared understanding of where we want to go. The strategies may differ, but the direction remains the same. [COORDINATOR, MAN]

Many interviewees stressed that homelessness and housing insecurity cannot be understood solely through the lens of sexual orientation or gender identity. Instead, experiences are shaped by the interaction of multiple social factors, including migration status, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, socioeconomic position, and previous experiences of discrimination, as this person pointed out:

I think it's very important for us to be intersectional. [SOCIAL WORKER, NON-BINARY]

Similarly, they highlighted the importance of recognizing the diversity that exists within LGBTQIA+ communities themselves:

There is not one community; there are communities within communities. [SOCIAL WORKER, MAN]

Participants also underscored the value of representation within service teams. While professional competence was considered essential, many respondents noted that the presence of LGBTQIA+ staff members can facilitate trust, identification, and understanding among assisted individuals. At the same time, staff stressed that diversity within teams should extend beyond LGBTQIA+ identities alone and include a range of perspectives and experiences.

Findings suggest that diverse and intersectional teams are better equipped to respond to the complexity of beneficiaries' lives while fostering more affirmative and responsive support environments.

5.3. Being a Point of Reference and Creating Safe Spaces

Across countries, staff frequently described their role as extending beyond the provision of practical housing support. Interviewees highlighted the importance of being a consistent point of reference for recipients particularly during periods characterized by uncertainty, instability, or experiences of exclusion.

I personally think that it's at least very important. I feel like it motivates me to do the work I do, that I have queer people around me and I feel safe in this community.

[VOLUNTEER, TRANS WOMAN]

Many respondents asserted that LGBTQIA+ individuals accessing housing support services often arrive after experiencing rejection, discrimination, family conflict, or repeated encounters with institutions that failed to meet their needs. In this context, the presence of a trusted professional or volunteer can represent an important source of stability and reassurance.

The main objective of my work is, above all, to allow that the people we welcome can be themselves, to allow them to be safe and to allow their inclusion in society.

[SOCIAL OPERATOR, WOMAN]

Staff described their role as creating environments where beneficiaries feel listened to, respected, and accepted without judgement. Establishing trust was considered a prerequisite for any successful intervention and often required time, consistency, and genuine availability. As one survey subject explained, it is important that people know

There is someone there to support them.

[SOCIAL EDUCATOR, WOMAN]

and to identify together the areas that need improvement.

The concept of safety emerged not only in concerning physical housing, but also in relation to emotional and relational dimensions. Participants highlighted the importance of creating spaces where individuals can express their identities openly, discuss personal challenges, and seek support without fear of stigma or discrimination.

These findings suggest that LGBTQIA+ housing services function not only as providers of accommodation and practical assistance, but also as trusted relational environments that offer continuity, recognition, and security.

5.3.1. Fostering a Sense of Belonging and Community

Another recurring theme concerns the role of services in fostering a sense of belonging and community. Staff consistently described community-building as a fundamental component of well-being and social inclusion for LGBTQIA+ individuals experiencing housing insecurity. Participants noted that many clients have experienced isolation, exclusion, or disrupted social networks. As a result, housing services often become important spaces for rebuilding social connections and developing supportive relationships with peers, volunteers, and staff members:

For some beneficiaries, the housing service represents the first environment in which they are able to express their gender identity, live openly in accordance with their sexual orientation, or explore and affirm their gender expression in ways that reflect their authentic selves. For several participants, the housing program was described as the first place where this became possible.

[SOCIAL WORKER, MAN]

Respondents highlighted how group activities, shared living experiences, community events, and informal moments of interaction contribute to the creation of meaningful social bonds. Beyond addressing immediate housing needs, these experiences help individuals develop a stronger sense of connection and collective identity:

There is a sense of community among us.

[SOCIAL WORKER, QUEER PERSON]

Similarly, staff members described the importance of cultivating organizational cultures based on mutual care, solidarity, and collective responsibility. These dynamics were perceived as beneficial not only for beneficiaries but also for staff and volunteers themselves.

The findings indicate that community-building constitutes a distinctive strength of LGBTQIA+ housing services. By creating opportunities for connection and belonging, these services help counteract the social isolation that frequently accompanies experiences of homelessness and marginalization.

I think they said that because we belong to the community, we understand the different kinds of levels and connections [...] being trans, the discrimination in work life and how it can lead to homelessness. We see all the colors and the layers or at least more than maybe those people who don't belong to the community.

[SOCIAL WORKER, NON-BINARY]

5.3.2. Supporting Self-Determination

Another theme concerns the promotion of self-determination and autonomy. Throughout all participating countries, staff underlined that the ultimate goal of support is not the dependency

on services, but rather the development of the resources, confidence, and capabilities necessary for individuals to make decisions about their own lives.

Participants described their role as accompanying rather than directing recipients. Support was often framed as a collaborative process in which staff provide information, opportunities, guidance, and practical assistance while respecting the choices and agency of service users:

They miss power in their everyday life, and I think the fact of providing a kitchen here, where each of them are able to cook their dishes, gives them power at least to feel like humans and not in some sort of prison.

[EDUCATOR, WOMAN]

Several interviewees highlighted the importance of recognizing that each individual follows a unique pathway, and that support must be adapted accordingly. This approach requires balancing guidance with respect for personal decision-making, even when beneficiaries make choices that personnel may not fully agree with. Similarly, staff stressed the importance of acknowledging the limits of their own role and recognizing that long-term change ultimately depends on the decisions and actions of the individuals themselves:

Participation is the key principle. In the development of an individual support plan, which necessarily involves shared rules and living alongside other people, beneficiaries need to be actively involved. Participation is the cornerstone of our approach: without participation, there is no project. Without participation, support and accommodation cannot continue.

[COORDINATOR, MAN]

The promotion of self-determination was also closely linked to broader concepts of empowerment, participation, and dignity. Participants viewed autonomy not simply as the achievement of independent housing, but as the capacity to exercise control over one's life, pursue personal goals, and participate fully in society. Overall, the findings suggest that supporting self-determination represents a core principle underpinning LGBTQIA+ housing services and shapes the way staff understand and deliver support.

5.3.3. Balancing Realism, Support and User Autonomy

A final theme concerns the delicate balance between providing support and promoting autonomy. Staff across countries described their role as helping beneficiaries navigate difficult circumstances while avoiding the creation of unrealistic expectations or forms of dependency. Participants frequently discussed the importance of communicating clearly about the possibilities and limitations of available services. While maintaining hope was considered important, respondents stressed that support must be grounded in realistic assessments of existing opportunities and constraints:

I think it's better to be realistic because it avoids creating hopes that are not going to materialize.

[SOCIAL OPERATOR, WOMAN]

Similarly, others described their role as helping clients develop a realistic understanding of housing markets, bureaucratic procedures, and available resources without discouraging their aspirations:

People often arrive with a whole set of expectations and aspirations. They may already have a very specific idea of the room they want, the house they would like to rent, the neighborhood they want to live in, or even how the place should be furnished. Our role is not to destroy that dream, but to develop a realistic understanding of the situation together. It's a kind of reality check.

[HOUSING SUPPORT WORKER, TRANS MAN]

Another key aspect concerns the cultivation of autonomy. Rather than solving problems on behalf of beneficiaries, trained workers sought to equip individuals with the skills, knowledge, and confidence necessary to navigate systems independently:

You make them autonomous.

[SOCIAL WORKER, MAN]

Subjects described this balance as one of the most challenging dimensions of their work. It requires empathy and support while also encouraging responsibility, self-determination, and active participation in decision-making processes.

The findings suggest that effective LGBTQIA+ housing support is characterized not only by the provision of assistance, but also by a commitment to fostering long-term autonomy and empowerment among service users.

5.4. Challenges and Areas for Improvement

Despite the many strengths identified by participants, staff across countries also highlighted a number of challenges affecting the sustainability and effectiveness of LGBTQIA+ housing support services.

The first challenge concerns the limited availability of resources. Participants frequently referred to the gap between the complexity of beneficiaries' needs and the resources that organizations can provide. Financial constraints, shortages of affordable housing options, and limited staff capacity often restrict the range of interventions that can be implemented.

There are only a few of us, and we can only do so much. We definitely need more people to join the team so that we can also work on funding applications and organizational

development. At the moment, there is a clear imbalance between the amount of work that needs to be done, the number of people available to do it, and the resources we have.

[VOLUNTEER, NON-BINARY]

The difficulty is also being able to provide support, because when we talk about support, we are really talking about dignity. Support cannot be dignified if a person does not have the resources necessary to live with dignity.

[SOCIAL OPERATOR, WOMAN]

Another recurring issue relates to the emotional demands of the work. While strong relationships with beneficiaries were described as a key element of effective support, participants acknowledged that continuous exposure to complex situations can generate emotional strain. Several respondents noted that maintaining professional boundaries requires ongoing effort and that burnout remains a significant risk, particularly in organizations that rely heavily on volunteer workers.

Personnel also identified challenges related to organizational growth. As services expand and become more professionalized, maintaining communication, coordination, and shared values becomes increasingly important. Participants emphasized the need for clearer procedures, stronger internal communication systems, and greater opportunities for supervision and professional development.

Finally, respondents highlighted the persistence of structural barriers affecting LGBTQIA+ individuals, including discrimination in housing, employment, healthcare, and administrative systems. While support services can mitigate some of these challenges, staff recognize that many obstacles originate beyond the scope of individual organizations and require broader institutional and policy responses.

5.5. Future Aspirations and Recommendations

Looking towards the future, participants expressed a strong commitment to strengthening and expanding LGBTQIA+ housing support services. Across countries, interviewees emphasized the importance of building more sustainable organizational structures while preserving the community-oriented values that characterize these initiatives as this participant said:

I would like to be able to give people this one-on-one support or support with housing and more concrete things.

[SOCIAL WORKER, NON-BINARY]

One key aspiration concerns the further professionalization of services through the recruitment of a dedicated team, the development of specialized expertise, and the creation of more stable funding mechanisms. Participants viewed these developments as essential for ensuring continuity, improving service quality, and reducing reliance on short-term or precarious resources:

I would like employment support to be stronger. I think I would feel more satisfied with our work if we were able to do more in that area. At times, I feel that I am falling short in relation to the residents and the role I am expected to play, especially when we talk about their pathway towards autonomy. Once the available support reaches its limits and the maximum timeframes are exhausted, there is often more that could be done... but not with the resources we currently have.

[HOUSING SUPPORT WORKER, TRANS MAN]

Respondents also stressed the importance of investing in staff well-being. Recommendations included expanding opportunities for supervision, peer support, training, and reflective practice to strengthen resilience and prevent burnout.

Another recurring recommendation involves promoting greater collaboration between LGBTQIA+ organizations ⁽⁴¹⁾, mainstream homelessness services, public institutions, and community stakeholders. Participants argued that stronger partnerships could improve referral strategies, facilitate access to resources, and increase awareness of the specific needs of LGBTQIA+ individuals experiencing housing insecurity.

Finally, respondents advocated for broader structural changes aimed at addressing the root causes of homelessness and exclusion. These include tackling discrimination, increasing access to affordable housing, improving employment opportunities, and ensuring that public services can respond to the diverse realities of LGBTQIA+ communities.

Overall, staff envisioned a future in which LGBTQIA+ housing support services are more stable, better resourced, and more widely recognized as an essential component of inclusive social welfare systems.

41 European Federation of Queer Shelters. (2025). <https://www.queershelters.eu/>

6

SWOT ANALYSIS AND GUIDELINES FOR SERVICES IMPLEMENTATION

6.1. Comparison of Beneficiaries' and Staffs' Perspectives

Throughout the findings, a strong convergence emerges between beneficiaries' and staffs' narratives regarding the core elements that make LGBTQIA+ housing services effective. Both groups consistently identify safety, the possibility of authentic self-expression, and the development of autonomy and self-determination as central outcomes of these services. Clients describe queer housing services as spaces of 'rebirth' where they can finally feel at ease, regain control over their lives, and develop meaningful relationships, while staff frame their role as creating environments of trust, belonging, and empowerment. This alignment is particularly evident in the emphasis placed on individualized pathways: beneficiaries value being able to make decisions about their own trajectories, and personnel conceptualize support as a gradual, step-by-step process that adapts to each person's pace and needs. Similarly, both groups highlight the importance of relational dimensions, including the quality of the alliance between staff and residents, which is seen as a key determinant of well-being, mastery, and recovery processes.

At the same time, some divergences are relevant regarding practice. Recipients place greater emphasis on the immediate and concrete barriers they encounter, such as limited availability of housing places, insufficient legal and psychological support, and challenges linked to communal living or transitions out of services. They also highlight the emotional impact of shared hardship within the community and the need for more visible positive trajectories and peer role models. Staff, while acknowledging these issues, tend to focus more on organizational and systemic constraints, including limited funding, emotional labor, and the need to balance support with the promotion of autonomy. These differences are not contradictory but rather complementary: they point to the necessity of integrating experiential knowledge with professional reflection. Concerning practice, this implies that service development should continuously mediate between immediate user needs and structural feasibility, ensuring that organizational decisions remain grounded in lived experience while maintaining sustainability and staff well-being.

6.2. SWOT Analysis of LGBTQIA+ Homelessness Support Services

6.2.1. Strengths

- Provision of safe, identity affirming environments that reduce minority stress and enable authenticity, dignity and self-expression.
- Strong focus on individualized, flexible and step-by-step support pathways promoting autonomy, mastery and self-determination.
- High level of specialized expertise on LGBTQIA+ identities among staff, ensuring affirmative and competent care.
- Centrality of community building, belonging and peer connection as resources for well-being and recovery.
- Trust based relationships between staff and beneficiaries, often extending beyond formal support and strengthening engagement.
- Multidisciplinary and holistic approaches addressing housing, mental health, legal and social needs.

6.2.2. Weaknesses

- Limited and unstable funding, often dependent on short term projects or donations, affecting sustainability and continuity.
- Insufficient housing capacity and shortage of available beds, leading to unmet demands and fragmentation of pathways.
- Gaps in legal, psychological and specialized support for complex cases.
- Challenges in managing communal living spaces, including conflicts, intersectional diversity and varying needs for autonomy or supervision.
- Emotional burden and risk of burnout among staff, particularly in under resourced circumstances.
- Limited presence of peer role models and insufficient representation of diverse intersectional identities within staff teams.

6.2.3. Opportunities

- Increasing recognition of LGBTQIA+ homelessness as a European policy issue, creating space for advocacy and institutional integration.
- Professionalization processes that strengthen organizational stability, access to funding and quality of services.

- Development of partnerships with mainstream homelessness services, public institutions and community actors to ensure integrated care pathways.
- Expansion of peer led approaches and involvement of experts by experience in service design and delivery.
- Growing evidence base supporting affirmative, rights based and intersectional interventions.

6.2.4. Threats

- Persistent structural discrimination in housing, employment and institutional systems that limit exit pathways from homelessness.
- Lack of formal recognition and integration of LGBTQIA+ services within public welfare systems.
- Increasing demand for services not matched by resources or infrastructure.
- Political polarization and anti LGBTQIA+ narratives that may undermine policy commitment and funding.
- Risk of service fragmentation and discontinuity linked to project based funding cycles.

PREVENTING AND COMBATING LGBTQIA+ HOMELESSNESS: CRITICAL AREAS FOR POLICY

LGBTQIA+ homelessness is a multidimensional phenomenon, requiring integrated responses. This final section will summarize some recommendations addressing multiple levels, from service provision to policy and research. These recommendations are directly grounded in the voices of beneficiaries and staff, whose perspectives have been central in shaping this report. Their contributions demonstrate the importance of participatory and reflexive approaches and highlight the need for such research to continue informing the field.

For policy makers

- Ensure structural recognition of LGBTQIA+ homelessness within national and European housing and social policy frameworks.
- Provide stable and long-term funding mechanisms to support the sustainability and expansion of specialized services.
- Integrate LGBTQIA+ perspectives into mainstream homelessness services, low-threshold services and other social services, including mandatory training for professionals working in education, social services, reception and support services and encouraging the establishment of intersectional, affirmative Strengthen data collection systems that capture sexual orientation and gender identity in homelessness statistics, while ensuring ethical safeguards.
- Address structural barriers in housing and labor markets, including discrimination and access to legal protection.

For service providers and practitioners

- Expand capacity and diversify housing solutions, including both emergency and long-term pathways tailored to different needs.
- Strengthen multidisciplinary support, particularly in legal assistance, mental health care and substance use harm reduction.

- Invest in staff well-being through supervision, training, and clear organizational boundaries to prevent burnout.
- Enhance entry level assessments for complex cases and develop integrated care pathways from the outset.
- Promote balanced communal living environments that combine clear rules with autonomy, mediation, and personalization.
- Support transitions from services through follow-up, employment support and connection with community resources.
- Ensure lifelong learning opportunities and capacity building for activists.

For LGBTQIA+ organisations and communities

- Foster peer support models and increase the involvement of experts by experience as mentors, staff members and co researchers.
- Promote visibility strategies that are context sensitive and aligned with beneficiaries' safety and preferences.
- Strengthen community networks that provide not only solidarity but also access to opportunities, role models and positive trajectories.

For research

- Continue participatory and qualitative research that recenters the lived experience of queer people experiencing homelessness as a form of expertise.
- Develop longitudinal studies focused on exit pathways, long term outcomes and sustainability of autonomy.
- Encourage cross national comparisons (and analysis?) to identify transferable models and context sensitive practices.
- Creating targeted datasets for policy-making and comprehensive advocacy, preventing and combating LGBTQIA+ homelessness requires coordinated and cross sectoral interventions that connect housing, health, employment, and social inclusion policies. Housing must be recognized, not only as an emergency response, but as a fundamental enabling condition for securing one's own dignity, self-determination, and full participation in society.
- The present research has confirmed that when services are grounded in lived experience, informed by intersectional perspectives and supported by adequate resources, they can play a transformative role in breaking cycles of marginalization and in opening pathways towards stable and self-determined futures.