

The Discrimination Epidemic

How COVID-19 restrictions are impacting LGBTQI+ Asylum Seekers in Samos and fueling a rise in discrimination.



1st March 2021

Since March 2020 COVID-19 restrictions have been imposed throughout Greece in an attempt to protect public health. Refugees and Asylum Seekers living in Receptions and Identification Centres (such as Vathy RIC) have faced some of the most restrictive measures. NGOs including MSF have expressed concern that the mass quarantine of camp residents are “ill-considered and potentially very damaging and harmful”.¹ The RIC in Samos has been under lockdown restrictions since 18th September 2020 with the COVID-19 response of authorities described as “negligent and dangerous”.² The IRC reported that since the 1st lockdown there has been a “71% spike in the number of people experiencing psychotic symptoms, while a 66% increase in self-harm.”³

Pre-pandemic LGBTQI+ asylum seekers were already particularly vulnerable, especially in emergency situations⁴, to violence, discrimination and difficulties accessing services. The UN report that, globally, violence due to a person's sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) exceed all other forms of hate crime⁵. Hate crimes against LGBTQI+ persons are the most common form of discrimination in Greece⁶ and whilst limited legal protections exist for queer persons, such protections are difficult to access, for all queer persons in Greece and are rarely realised for LGBTQI+ asylum seekers especially in the camp settings^{7,8}. Moreover as ILGA highlight “asylum detention remains the default form of reception - known to be dangerous and harmful for LGBTI asylum seekers.”⁹

¹ Médecins Sans Frontières. (2021). *Greek police enforce unwarranted and cruel quarantine of Moria camp on Lesbos*. Retrieved from <https://www.msf.org/greek-police-enforce-unwarranted-and-cruel-quarantine-moria-camp>

² Médecins Sans Frontières. (2020). *Negligent and dangerous COVID-19 response in Vathy camp, Samos*. Retrieved from <https://www.msf.org/greece-negligent-covid-19-response-vathy-camp-samos>

³ International Rescue Committee. (2020). *Refugees in Greece enduring a mental health crisis, as IRC psychologists witness a 66% increase in self-harm among people in camps*. Retrieved from <https://eu.rescue.org/press-release/refugees-greece-enduring-mental-health-crisis-irc-psychologists-witness-66-increase>

⁴ UN Human Rights Council. (2015). *Final research-based report of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee on best practices and main challenges in the promotion and protection of human rights in post-disaster and post-conflict situations*. Retrieved 21 December 2019, from <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/final-research-based-report-human-rights-council-advisory-committee-best-practices>

⁵ Kahn, S., & Alessi, E. (2017). *Coming Out Under the Gun: Exploring the Psychological Dimensions of Seeking Refugee Status for LGBT Claimants in Canada*. *Journal Of Refugee Studies*, 31(1), 22-41. doi: 10.1093/jrs/fex019

⁶ News247. (2021). *Προσβολές ή εξύβριση σε δημόσιες υπηρεσίες έχει δεχτεί ένα στα τρία ΛΟΑΤΚΙ+ άτομα στην Ελλάδα*. News247. Retrieved from <https://www.news247.gr/koinonia/prosvoles-i-exyvrissi-se-dimosies-ypiresies-echei-dechtei-ena-sta-tria-loatki-ato-ma-stin-ellada.9080441.html>

⁷ Gavrielides, T., Alexander, J., Anastasi, V., Sakellariou, E., Elferink, J., & Emmen, M. et al. (2017). *Supporting And Including LGBTI Migrants Needs, Experiences & Good Practices*. London: The IARS International Institute.

⁸ Reda, A., & Proudfoot, P. (2020). *Against Abandonment: Activist-Humanitarian Responses to LGBT Refugees in Athens and Beirut*. *Journal Of Refugee Studies*. doi: 10.1093/jrs/fez114

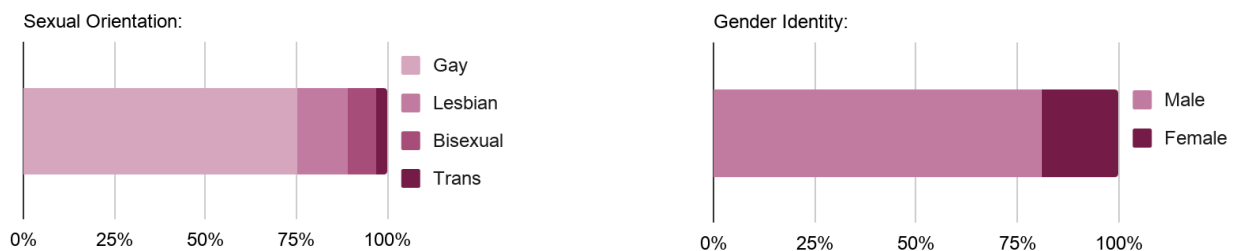
⁹ ILGA Europe. (2021). *Annual Review Of The Human Rights Situation Of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, And Intersex People In Greece Covering The Period Of January To December 2020*. ILGA. Retrieved from <https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/2021/greece.pdf>

Poor mental health among LGBTQI+ asylum seekers is well documented with high rates of stress and anxiety disorders, depression and suicidality reported. There is growing understanding that persons with SOGI that differs to societal and cultural expectations face additional social determinants of health because of this. This links to the Minority Stress Model that links stigma and discrimination to worse well-being outcomes for minority groups¹⁰. The pervasiveness of discrimination to LGBTQI+ asylum seekers is described below and highlighted in the results of this research:

“Here in the camp, people don’t like us , we suffer insults, hate, jealousy and other forms of mockery. Since we’re powerless at these type of things, we ask ourselves if this is the situation only in the RIC camp or it’s like this in the whole Europe”

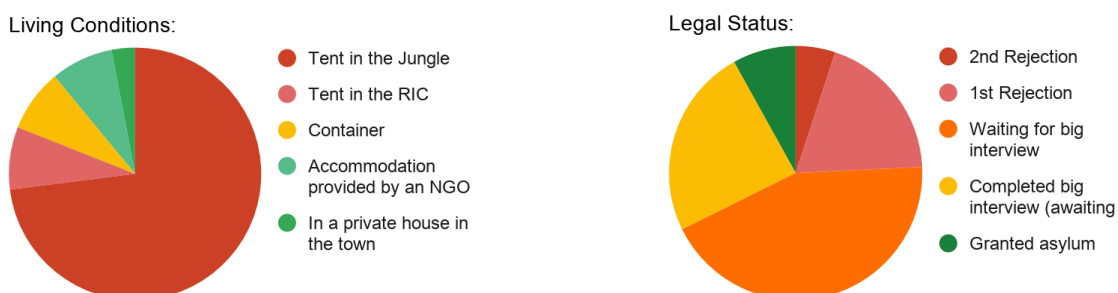
OUR RESEARCH

We asked LGBTQI+ asylum seekers about how the lockdown restriction had affected them as LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and refugees on Samos. **37** people participated who had spent on average **1.3 years** on Samos. Samos RIC has been under lockdown measures for a total of **6 months** since the start of the pandemic¹¹.



Living conditions and legal status:

81% of participants live in a tent, **8%** in a container in the camp and **11%** in other accommodation. **67%** are waiting for an interview or decision on their case, **24%** have had their applications for international protection rejected and only **8%** have been granted asylum.



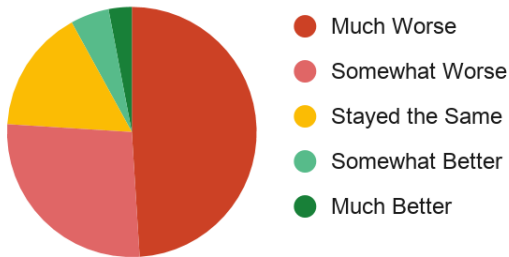
¹⁰ Meyer, I. (2015). Resilience in the study of minority stress and health of sexual and gender minorities. *Psychology Of Sexual Orientation And Gender Diversity*, 2(3), 209-213. doi: 10.1037/sgd0000132

¹¹ Samos 24. (2020). Δύο αιτούντες άσυλο με κορωνοϊό στο ΚΥΤ Σάμου. *Samos 24*. Retrieved from https://www.samos24.gr/%ce%b4%cf%8d%ce%bf-%ce%b1%ce%b9%cf%84%ce%bf%cf%8d%ce%bd%cf%84%ce%b5%cf%82-%ce%ac%cf%83%cf%85%ce%bb%ce%bf-%ce%bc%ce%b5-%ce%ba%ce%bf%cf%81%cf%89%ce%bd%ce%bf%cf%8a%cf%8c-%cf%83%cf%84%ce%bf-%ce%ba%cf%85/?fbclid=IwAR27-BmURaLs17p9FSaYUEIPB2DOc5csh-wd-8TvYPH_i-KfGydE09dtHSg

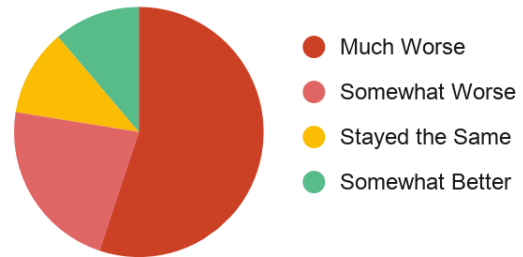
The impact on physical and mental health:

Participants were asked to complete the following statements indicating how the lockdown had affected them. Over **3 in 4** reported that their mental health had got worse, **1 in 2** of those much worse. Similarly, over **75%** reported their physical health had also gotten worse.

During the lockdown my mental health has become ...



During the lockdown my physical health has become

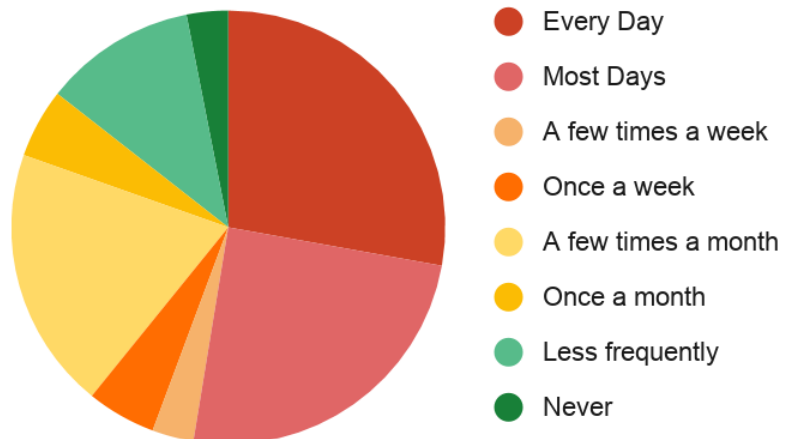


Increase in discrimination:

68% of people reported an increase in discrimination because of their LGBTQI+ identity since the beginning of lockdown measures in September 2019 (37% increased a lot / 30% increased) . **27%** of people reported that discrimination levels stayed the same while only **1** (3%) participant reported a reduction in the discrimination they face and this person was not residing in the RIC at this time.

During the lockdown on average I face discrimination...

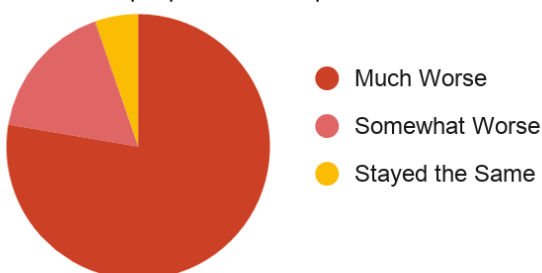
The prevalence and pervasive nature of discrimination is highlighted in the responses to the frequency of discrimination that LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and refugees are currently facing on Samos.



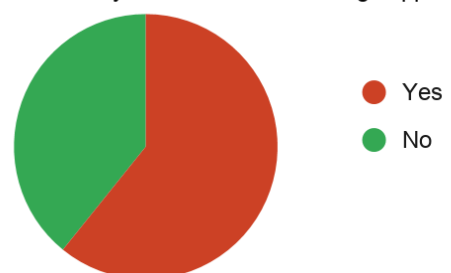
Overall impact and access to services:

89% of all participants report that the lockdown has made the situation for them worse with **59%** of respondents facing difficulties accessing services.

For LGBTQI+ people in the camp the lockdown has



Have you faced any difficulties in accessing support





Implications

The findings in this report reflect the experience of many other LGBTQI+ persons around the world who have faced increasing marginalisation globally during the pandemic¹².

The restrictive measures are having a significant negative impact on LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and refugees in Samos. Immediate action, from the competent authorities, is needed to protect the well-being and safeguard the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons.

During the reception and identification of asylum seekers it is imperative that “reasonable measures to prevent illtreatment” are taken to ensure that queer claimants Article 3 right to freedom from degrading treatment are not infringed¹³. It is imperative that together the Greek authorities, NGOs and other protection actors take action through the strengthening of SGBV prevention and response mechanisms to address the impact that COVID-19 restrictions are having. Additional steps must be taken to ensure that LGBTQI+ persons can access protective mechanisms in a safe and sensitive way.

The development of safe mechanisms for LGBTQI+ RIC residents to report incidents is essential and this must address the challenges such persons face in accessing mainstream mechanisms. Moreover, the actions as inscribed in Greek law to be taken on such reports to protect those facing discrimination must be enacted to ensure that the basic rights of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers are protected.

It should be acknowledged that Greek LGBTQI+ people currently also face difficulties and barriers in reporting and accessing support in the national context. Training for authorities to further the understanding of such authorities on the needs of LGBTQI+ persons (both Greek and RIC residents) who may need protection is one way that existing mechanisms could be strengthened to address the barriers for all LGBTQI+ persons.¹⁴

Overall this report highlights how the unsuitable and “often dangerous living”¹⁵ conditions of the RIC, barriers to adequate protection from the competent authorities and COVID-19 restrictions have compounded to increase the suffering of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers on Samos.

Samos LGBTQI+ Group hopes to work with our current partners and other actors to work on solutions to address the concerns highlighted in this report to improve the situation and promote the rights of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and refugees in Samos.

All correspondence can be sent to samoslgbtqigroup@gmail.com

N.B. [The comprehensive data set can be found here.](#)

¹² Human Rights Watch. (2020). *LGBTQ Inequality and Vulnerability in the Pandemic*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/18/lgbtq-inequality-and-vulnerability-pandemic>

¹³ Judgment on Merits delivered by a Grand Chamber *Khlaifia and Others v. Italy* (just satisfaction), no. 16483/12, para 161, ECHR 2016 (extracts).

¹⁴ ILGA Europe. (2020). *Annual Review Of The Human Rights Situation Of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, And Intersex People In Greece Covering The Period Of January To December 2019*. ILGA. Retrieved from <https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/2020/greece.pdf>

¹⁵ International Rescue Committee. (2020). *Refugees in Greece enduring a mental health crisis, as IRC psychologists witness a 66% increase in self-harm among people in camps*. Retrieved from <https://eu.rescue.org/press-release/refugees-greece-enduring-mental-health-crisis-irc-psychologists-witness-66-increase>