**HELP international course launch and conference on LGBTI persons in the Asylum Procedure**

*Strasbourg, 4 December 2023*

*Organised by the Council of Europe SOGI Unit and HELP Programme*

***Concept paper and agenda***

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| **Date**  | 4 December 2023, 9.00 – 18.00 |
| **Location**  | Strasbourg (Agora, Room G03)  |
| **Language**  | English (French interpretation provided during the launch event)  |
| **Participation**  | Professionals working in the asylum field, including those who will be taking the online tutored course (online attendance) |
| **Registration for attendees** **Webstream (live)**  | Deadline: 30 November 2023 (REGISTRATION CLOSED) **AVAILABLE HERE**  |

**Concept**

In many states around the world, LGBTI persons are subject to serious human rights violations on account of their real or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), particularly when these do not conform to dominant social and cultural norms. Persecution, including discrimination from both State and non-State actors force LGBTI persons to flee their countries of origin or places of habitual residence in search of a safe environment in which they can freely express their SOGIESC.

Often, LGBTI persons seeking international protection experience barriers to the adjudication of their asylum claims, such as: lack of recognition in the national legislation of sexual orientation or gender identity as valid grounds for the granting of refugee status and asylum; lack of a comprehensive definition of persecution LGBTI persons may face, within the meaning of the 1951 Refugee Convention; and lack of understanding and knowledge of the specific situation of LGBTI persons by the asylum authorities.

Assessing the applicant’s credibility is one of the main challenges for the member states when reviewing asylum claims based on SOGIESC. The difficulties to obtain accurate information on the situation of LGBTI persons in the country of origin can negatively influence the decision-making process. Further, there is also a high risk of rejection of the asylum claim based on SOGIESC due to late disclosure of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Regarding the reception conditions of LGBTI persons, their specific needs, as a vulnerable group, are often disregarded. An early and correct assessment of their risks and vulnerabilities would enable LGBTI persons to benefit from adequate health care and psychological assistance, protection against harassment, violence, isolation and sexual exploitation.

The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunija Mijatovic [expressed](https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/open-minds-are-needed-to-improve-the-protection-of-lgbti-asylum-seekers-in-europe) concern regarding the protection of LGBTI asylum seekers in Europe, and found that there is an urgent need for practical guidance and training for all those involved in the asylum procedure.

The HELP module “*LGBTI persons in the Asylum Procedure*” seeks to increase the capacity of legal professionals dealing with asylum claims based on SOGIESC, by explaining the key concepts and stereotypes or incorrect assumptions in adjudicating cases involving LGBTI persons, describing international standards and how they have been applied by national asylum authorities and courts across Europe, as well as relevant case-law. The overall objective of the course is to equip professionals with a better understanding of the rights of LGBTI asylum-seekers in different stages of their asylum-claim, of the substantive and procedural aspects, thus enabling them to apply a human rights approach throughout the decision-making process.

Consequently, seizing the opportunity of the launching and promotion of the HELP module “*LGBTI persons in the Asylum Procedure*”, this event gathers international and national stakeholders to exchange on existing relevant standards, practices and tools, and to raise awareness on the lived realities and rights of LGBTI asylum seekers, whose specific needs and vulnerabilities are often misunderstood or overlooked.

The conference will be an opportunity to hear personal stories from LGBTI persons who left their countries for fear of being persecuted due to their SOGIESC and who have encountered numerous obstacles during their journey to a safer country, as well as their experience after resettlement. The perspectives of civil society, who provide support and guidance and who are knowledgeable about the extent of the phenomenon, will enable a better understanding of the overall phenomenon.

The conference will also explore the specific challenges for the reception and integration of LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees thus striving to identify solutions for a better inclusion of LGBTI asylum-seekers.

**Other information**

The international and multistakeholder launch will be hybrid and will be held on **4 December 2023** **in Strasbourg, France, at the premises of the Council of Europe.** The working language will be English (French interpretation provided).

**Further information**

For additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Ana-Maria Telbis (Ana-Maria.TELBIS@coe.int) or Ioana BARA-BUSILA (ioana.bara@coe.int), Tudor Taba (Tudorel.TABA@coe.int).

**Agenda**\*

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| 4 December 2023, **Agora, Room G03** **All times CET**  |  |
| 8.30 – 9.00 | Arrival of participants and registration  |
| 9.00 – 10.00 | **Opening**Moderator: ***Thorsten AFFLERBACH***, *Head of Division, Inclusion and Anti-discrimination programmes, Council of Europe* ***Jeroen SCHOKKENBROEK****, Director, Directorate of Anti-Discrimination,* *Council**of Europe****Leyla KAYACIK****, Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for migration and refugees, Council of Europe* ***Andreas WISSNER****, UNHCR Representative to the European Institutions in Strasbourg****Eva PASTRANA****, Head of the HELP Programme, Council of Europe* ***Farah ABDI****, Asylum and Communications Officer, Transgender Europe*  |
| 10.00 – 10.15  | **Presentation of the HELP Programme and platform** *Ana-Maria TELBIS, ‘HELP in the EU’ Project Coordinator, HELP Programme, Council of Europe*  |
| 10.15 – 10.45 | Group photo & Coffee Break  |
| 10.45 – 12.15 | **A path strewn with pitfalls – the lived realities of LGBTI asylum seekers** Moderator: ***Gabriella CALLEJA****, Senior Policy Offier, CoE SOGI Unit** ***Francois Zankih,*** *Syrian human rights defender*
* ***Purity Tumukwasibwe****, Trans rights activist*
* ***Jelena Ilić,*** *Belgrade Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) Asylum and Migration Programme Coordinator (Serbia) - online*
* ***Vuk Raičević****, GIZ Protection Advisor (Serbia)*
* ***Neil Falzon, Director,*** *Aditus Foundation (Malta) - online*
* ***Lesvos Lgbtiq+ Refugee Solidarity*** *(Greece)*
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| 12.15 – 13.45 | Lunch Break |
| 13.45 – 15.15 | **Navigating the landscape - existing standards and tools to improve effective access to the asylum system for LGBTI applicants**Moderator: ***Ioana BARA-BUSILA****, Legal Officer, CoE SOGI Unit /* ***Francisco PEÑA DÍAZ, Ph.D****., Researcher and Consultant on the Human Rights of LGBTI Persons*Overview of the existing standards:* ***Francisco PEÑA DÍAZ****, Ph.D., Researcher and Consultant on the Human Rights of LGBTI Persons*
* EUAA module “Applicants with diverse SOGIESC”

***Martina FIALOVA****, Training Officer, Training and Professional Development Centre, EUAA** Jurisprudence on LGBTIQ applicants in international protection

***Liana* *MUNTEAN****, Information and Analysis Officer, EUAA** EUAA Case Law Database as a tool to search for updated jurisprudence on asylum

***Ana Isabela TRIFESCU****, Information and Analysis Officer, EUAA** ***Delphine LENEUTRE****, Legal Associate, UNHCR Representation to the European Institutions in Strasbourg*

 Good practices: * ***Ralph GUTH, Queer Base Austria*** – *online*
* ***Rustem YUNUSOV****, National coordinator LGBTIQ, Swedish Migration Agency*
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| 15.15 – 15.45 | Coffee Break |
| 15.45 – 17.15 | **Beyond the asylum claim – specific challenges for the reception and integration of LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees**Moderator: ***Evgenia GIAKOUMOPOULOU****,* *CoE SOGI Unit** ***Zohra Mousavi****, ILGA ASIA*

 * ***Morán Pérez,*** *European Partnership Director, Safe Place International*
* ***Ahmed El-Salawy****, IGLYO*
* *Platform TU-Mariupol (Ukraine)*
* *Office for the Promotion of Equal Treatment and Removal discrimination based on race or ethnic origin – UNAR (Italy) (tbc)*
* ***Refugee Committee*** *(tbc)*
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| 17.15 – 17.50 | **The implementation of the course: presentation of the HELP online course on LGBTI persons in the Asylum Procedures and the course page, planning, evaluation***Evgenia GIAKOUMOPOULOU, Head of the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Unit, Council of Europe**Danai ANGELI, HELP international tutor*  |
| 17.50 – 18.00 | **Conclusion and closure*****Hallvard GORSETH****, Anti-discrimination Department Head of Department*  |

*\*Agenda may be subject to change*