

Access to Information and Support for LGBTQI+ People Seeking Asylum:

A Qualitative Exploration of Coventry's Asylum Accommodation

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Abstract

Both asylum seekers and LGBTQI+ people systemically lack access to information; in the context of the British asylum system, intersections and interactions between being LGBTQI+ and seeking asylum aggravate this insufficiency. This research project is unique in its exploration of the effects of the hostile asylum accommodation environment on LGBTQI+ people's access to information through the case study of Coventry's immigration accommodation. The research question 'What is the nature of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers' access to information and support in the context of Coventry's immigration accommodation?' was explored through interviews and focus groups with local LGBTQI+ people seeking asylum. The findings show that participants mainly accessed information through government-funded charities and accommodation staff, and that they had limited access to services specifically developed for LGBTQI+ people. They faced violence in the asylum accommodation, which translated into isolation and fear of revealing their sexual orientations and/or gender identities in order to request specialised information from housing staff. The fear was aggravated by staff inaction, which led to participants feeling discriminated against, and which further reduced their attempts to request support. This created a vicious cycle, in which LGBTQI+ people seeking asylum have continuously less access to information, which illustrates a systemic unpreparedness in the British asylum system to support this group.

Keywords: Asylum Seekers' Human Rights, Access to Information, Queer Studies and Migration, Development Studies

Introduction

Amid continuous implementation of harsh immigration policies that seek to control and deport those looking to obtain **refugee** status in the UK or '**asylum seekers**', people seeking asylum on the grounds of sexual

orientation and/or gender identity must navigate this hostile environment to fulfil a two-fold task: they must prove to the Home Office first that they are **LGBTQI+** and second that this has led them to be persecuted in their home countries (Ward, 2018; Heimer, 2019; UNHCR, n.d.). Information about how to access support, such as housing, finances, solicitors and healthcare, is essential to enable successful navigation through the asylum system.

The aim of this research project was to understand if the sources that LGBTQI+ people seeking asylum use to access information provide them with the support they need, and how this interacts with the violence and discrimination they face in asylum accommodation. Thus, the following research question was explored: ‘What is the nature of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers’ access to information and support in the context of Coventry’s **immigration accommodation?**’

Although there is a growing field of literature on LGBTQI+ asylum seekers’ experiences in **immigration detention centres**, their access to information in immigration accommodation facilities has not yet been studied in depth. This research project contributes to filling this gap by exploring the case study of the city with the most people seeking asylum per inhabitant in the West Midlands: Coventry (Sturge, 2024).

Two focus groups and five interviews with a total of twelve participants were conducted and thematically analysed to explore access to information in three asylum accommodation types: hotels, shared housing and living with friends. Findings show that the fear of revealing themselves as LGBTQI+ due to violence in immigration accommodation and staff inaction led participants to avoid asking for the information and support they required, revealing a systemic lack of attention towards LGBTQI+ people within the asylum system.

Literature review

LGBTQI+ people in the British asylum system

A perspective of homonationalism

Over the past decade, the UK has seen a simultaneous advancement of LGBTQI+ legislation (**Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013**) and an imposition of harsh immigration policies (**Nationality and Borders Act 2022; Illegal Migration Act 2023**). Heimer (2019) argues that this

exemplifies British 'Homonationalism', a term that Puar (2013) developed to describe the usage of increased legal and consumer LGBTQI+ rights to maintain a progressive international image while implementing policies that seek further surveillance, detention and deportation of the asylum seeker and refugee community.

Heimer (2019) finds that asylum claims on the grounds of sexual orientation and/or gender identity (SOGI) in the UK are part of a homonationalist attempt by the country to demonstrate itself as a selfless defender of non-Western LGBTQI+ people from their own 'backward homophobic cultures' (Heimer, 2019: 178). Lewis (2021) argues that the asylum system demands that asylum seekers behave as 'good sexual citizens' (2021: 751) by portraying identities, visibilities and consumption that reproduce Western conceptions of being LGBTQI+. When they are unable to do this due to racist preconceptions, poverty, detention and lack of access to solicitors, they then must act as 'good deportees' (2021: 760) by complying with their own deportation. This hostile environment is reinforced through the perpetration of violence and discrimination by other detainees and staff while in detention (Stonewall and UKLGIG, 2016).

LGBTQI+ people in the UK's immigration detention and shared accommodation

LGBTQI+ people struggle to reveal their SOGI out of fear of facing discrimination and harassment in immigration detention (Harvey, 2023; Lewis, 2021; Stonewall and UKLGIG, 2016; UKLGIG, 2018). This fear is not unfounded as research has shown that LGBTQI+ people in British immigration detention encounter discrimination, harassment and abuse perpetuated by other detainees and staff (Lewis, 2021; Harvey, 2023; Stonewall and UKLGIG, 2016; UKLGIG, 2018). Stonewall and UKLGIG (2016) found that LGBTQI+ people were hesitant to speak to staff about their needs, and Harvey's (2023) research shows that staff offer them mixed responses of support, inaction or discrimination. Fear of having their SOGI revealed and the constant presence of other detainees and staff pose an obstacle to communication with solicitors and other people required to provide the information they need to support their asylum claims (UKLGIG, 2018). Experiences in detention have long-lasting mental health impacts for LGBTQI+ people seeking asylum: Ward (2018) highlights that the British asylum system contributes to asylum seekers' retraumatisation, exacerbating their PTSD symptoms.

Despite the lack of literature on LGBTQI+ experiences in British asylum accommodation, there is evidence of similarities to immigration detention. News outlets have reported on LGBTQI+ people's experiences in British asylum accommodation, which includes bullying and abuse (Barker, 2021; Lyons, 2018; Stroude, 2023; Taylor, 2023) and staff inaction when reporting abuse (Hearst, 2023). Studies conducted in Europe and Canada have outlined similar discrimination and harassment within immigration accommodation towards LGBTQI+ people (Abramovich *et al.*, 2020; FRA, 2017; Lee and Brotman, 2011).

The Women and Equalities Parliamentary Committee (2023) recently released a report highlighting that LGBTQI+ people in asylum face verbal and physical homophobic harassment and live in constant fear of their SOGI being revealed. This fear keeps LGBTQI+ people from contacting support groups and reporting harassment, with their complaints often being dismissed by accommodation staff when filed (2023). The report demands that LGBTQI+ people, families and children be placed in separate accommodation (2023).

Existing research therefore indicates that LGBTQI+ people face harsh conditions in the UK's immigration accommodation and immigration detention.

Access to information

Information is essential for people seeking asylum to access the timely support they require to fulfil their legal, education, health and housing needs (Abdi *et al.*, 2023; Oduntan and Ruthven, 2020). Oduntan and Ruthven (2019) describe the asylum journey as 'survival of the informed', whereby those with more information can navigate the system better than others. In a later study, Oduntan and Ruthven (2020) split information sources accessed by refugees and asylum seekers into two main categories: formal (includes caseworkers, social workers and solicitors) and informal (includes friends and family). They also found that service providers did not consistently provide information to asylum seekers. Others have shown that refugees and asylum seekers did not know what questions to ask and struggled to access appropriate information at the time that it was needed (Kainat *et al.*, 2022). Bronstein (2017) argues that language abilities are central to asylum seekers' access to information, indicating that the information format is essential in addition to its source.

The literature shows that LGBTQI+ people lack access to information on

several fronts, such as in school curriculums (Kosciw *et al.*, 2020; Russell *et al.*, 2021), incarceration (Austin *et al.*, 2020) and health (Taylor *et al.*, 2019). Taylor *et al.* (2019), for example, find that LGBTQI+ cancer patients lack information provided for them both online and offline, leading to higher cancer mortality rates among this group. The consistency of these studies' findings indicates that LGBTQI+ people systemically lack access to information and thus face additional intersectional barriers to securing support.

Methods

To explore the linkage between lack of access to information and the hostile environment encountered by LGBTQI+ people seeking asylum in the UK, this research project posed the question 'What is the nature of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers' access to information and support in the context of Coventry's immigration accommodation?'

To answer the research question, two focus groups and five semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and refugees. Respondents were identified through **convenience sampling**, which implies that participant recruitment was not randomised and their accessibility was prioritised. This is a common practice in LGBTQI+ asylum research, given frequent challenges in gaining participants' trust (Nematy *et al.*, 2023).

Focus groups (FG) allow researchers to observe the interactions between people with similar experiences and qualities (Lewis-Beck *et al.*, 2004). They were conducted in this case to tackle the experiences that participants had in different immigration accommodation types: immigration hotels – an accommodation with shared bedrooms, bathrooms and eating facilities; Serco Housing – a shared flat with four to eight inhabitants; and living with friends – often sleeping on their couches and only staying for short periods of time. Due to a limited number of people willing to take part in the focus groups, the participants were divided into two: the first group (FG1) was composed of seven participants who lived or had lived in immigration hotels and the second (FG2) had six participants, three of whom lived with friends, two in Serco Housing and one in a charity-provided accommodation. Seven of the participants revealed that they had lived in more than one type of immigration accommodation, and one participant was present in both FGs, since they had lived in immigration hotels before being moved to Serco Housing. Three participants made it known that they were living in Birmingham and

the other nine were living in Coventry. All had regular contact with Coventry and its immigration services. The FGs allowed for participants to familiarise themselves with the research before being invited to participate in interviews.

Four out of five of the interviews were conducted with participants of the FGs. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a research method because, given the gap in the literature, the flexibility of this method allowed participants to include unexpected elements that they found relevant (Kallio *et al.*, 2016). Researchers have overwhelmingly used semi-structured interviews to explore asylum seekers' experiences and access to information (Abdi *et al.*, 2023; Kainat *et al.*, 2022; Lee and Brotman, 2011; Nematy *et al.*, 2023; Oduntan and Ruthven, 2020; Stonewall and UKLGIG, 2016). Four of the interviewees were in the process of seeking asylum and had SOGI-based claims: one was living in an immigration hotel, two in Serco Housing and one in charity accommodation. The last participant was a refugee living in private accommodation in Coventry, who had previously lived in G4S Housing – the current equivalent to Serco Housing.

Given the legal and financial constraints faced by people seeking asylum in the UK (Right to Remain, 2024; Visas and Immigration, 2024), they were considered in this research as vulnerable adults, requiring a rigorous ethical procedure undertaken through the University of Warwick to ensure their safety and wellbeing. The interviews and FGs took place in familiar and safe environments to ensure participants were secure and felt safe to share their experiences. The consent process was explained to the participants multiple times and was translated into French to accommodate those who were not proficient in English. It was explained to them that no information would be collected or shared that was not relevant to the research, and pseudonyms would be used for all participants. Participants were given two weeks after the FGs to opt-out and the researcher returned to the group after each FG to confirm that members were still comfortable sharing their experiences. The interviews and FGs were recorded on a secure wired device and later transcribed by the researcher.

After collection, the research was analysed following Braun and Clarke's (2021) guide to thematic analysis:

1. Familiarisation with the research through listening and transcribing recordings
2. Data coding through segmenting interviews and FGs into common topics addressed by different participants
3. Development of initial themes through finding patterns across the interviews

- and FGs
- 4. Reviewing and restructuring overarching themes and sub-themes
- 5. Defining and naming themes
- 6. Write-up and final adjustments

The main themes identified through the thematic analysis were:

- Information acquiring through NGOs and Serco
- Harassment, abuse and discrimination – within the asylum community and among staff
- Fear of revealing one's SOGI
- Fear of asking for support
- Disillusion with the British asylum system and homonationalism
- Potential solutions

Findings were compared to the literature and analysed through the lens of homonationalism, which provided a framework for exploring the interactions between state power, sexual orientation, gender identity, race and immigration status.

Findings

Sources of information

The main sources accessed to request information or support were as follows: nine participants stated they consulted two charities funded by the government that supported refugees and asylum seekers nationally and locally: Migrant Help (MH) (Migrant Help, n.d.) and the Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre (CRMC, n.d.). Eight participants referred to Serco staff employed by the hotels and Serco Housing, and four chose to search for their needs online. Those who lived in the hotels mainly consulted the Serco staff, while those living in Serco Housing, with friends or with charities referred to CRMC and MH. Four participants mentioned language barriers and one participant named it as his main obstacle in navigating the asylum system.

Participants reported struggling to find sources of information and support that catered to their circumstances as LGBTQI+ individuals. Cristina resorted to online sources after being unable to fulfil her information needs through CRMC or MH, only to find they were also incomplete: 'you need to go online and it's not everything that is online,' she stated. FG1 conversations highlighted that LGBTQI+ hotel residents were provided with the same services accessible to all – Eske highlighted that 'if you have specific LGBT issues, they won't be able to help you'. Additionally, two participants stated they had been unaware of the possibility of claiming asylum before moving to the UK. Both had come to

the UK for work purposes initially and claimed asylum when they realised they were not safe in their home countries. These participants particularly struggled to access information and support when they first claimed asylum, explaining that they did not know how or where to request it.

Several participants expressed feeling afraid of asking for LGBTQI+ support from the CRMC, MH and Serco staff. Eske explained that she did not feel comfortable asking the staff for help: 'I had to search online where should I go to communicate with more people like me. I couldn't ask them.' In addition to depending on accommodation type, the sources of information chosen were impacted heavily by participants' fear of communicating their SOGI-related needs.

Fear of revealing their sexual orientations and gender identities

All 12 participants expressed that there were risks to revealing themselves as LGBTQI+ in their accommodation and only two stated they chose to speak openly about their SOGI. Eleven participants stated they avoided revealing their SOGI in their accommodation.

Homophobia in the asylum system

In FG1, participants' experiences of discrimination and harassment in the hotels were a primary reason for concealing their SOGI. Eske explained that her roommates 'would always talk bad about LGBT people, so I was not really comfortable sharing anything with them'. Participants who were living with friends also felt they were not able to reveal their SOGI to them and there was an added pressure of the possibility of becoming homeless if they were to find out. 'Literally you can't tell them,' said Gabriel, who later explained that 'they see you as the devil'. Blaine told FG2 about their experiences of living with a friend, who did not react well to their SOGI: 'They say that's not right, [...] it was just not okay for me to stay there so I had to find another place [...] they don't take that lightly once they find out your sexuality.' Blaine was homeless when this focus group took place, revealing the impact of this discrimination on his previous housing arrangements.

Participants expressed feeling isolated from their roommates and other hotel residents. Cristina said that people would avoid her in the cafeteria. Samira explained that 'they don't sit with you because they think you are dirty. You are LGBT, so you are dirty.' Samira compared the treatment they received publicly and privately:

When you are in a public place like a canteen, they are not coming close to you, because people know you. But if they find you somewhere like in corridor, in toilet, in your room alone, then they grab you.

This was one of the several accounts of experiences with sexual harassment which primarily occurred in the immigration hotels. Miduna, a transgender woman, explained that due to her experiences of being harassed, she would isolate herself as much as possible:

The guy was blocking me in the lift suddenly, with no reasons. Then I know they are trying to do something [sexual]. I also try to be silent, avoid everything. [...] I try to be alone, eat alone.

When Cristina revealed her sexual orientation, a man began harassing her daily, which culminated in pushing her to inform the police. She was subsequently removed from the hotel and placed in Serco Housing, where she faced further difficulties in requesting support when needed due to a lack of contact with Serco staff.

Several participants expressed that the violence they faced made them feel that although they were in the UK, they remained in similar conditions that led them to flee their home countries. Miduna explained that she faced abuse and discrimination for her SOGI in her home country and added that ‘the same thing is happening [in the UK], same stigma and discrimination. [...] is not safe for us’. Seven participants thought a possible solution was to create separate accommodation dedicated only to LGBTQI+ people and their allies.

The consequence of being in this environment was hesitation to request information out of fear of having their SOGI unintentionally revealed. Eske described a particular moment in which she wanted to request different accommodation ‘but then I decided against it because I didn’t want to tell the hotel staff. And maybe I was scared that maybe they would tell other people, maybe it would get out.’ Samira, who had attempted to promote an LGBTQI+ asylum seekers’ support group at the asylum hotel, stated that people were too afraid to take the leaflets she was distributing. She remembered that even those who had taken one ‘brought it back said, “No no no” like very loud, very obvious “No no no, I don’t need it!”’ This is evidence that participants’ fear of being discovered as LGBTQI+ had a direct impact on their access to information or to access support.

Participants who lived in Serco Housing or with friends had similar problems, although this was alleviated by having more freedom to leave their accommodation. Gabriel explained that he would always make calls

about his SOGI-based asylum case while on walks to avoid revealing himself to his housemate. Fear of having their SOGI revealed and the violence this would attract was therefore a primary obstacle for participants in accessing the information and support they needed, especially for hotel residents.

Staff and service providers' inaction

Inaction from staff and service providers was another primary obstacle for participants to obtain the information and support they needed: almost all interviewees highlighted that, even if they gathered the courage to reveal their SOGIs, they would be met with 'deaf ears', as described by Blaine.

Serco staff's inaction was a central concern of hotel residents. Gray and Eske stated that if they spoke to Serco staff, they would 'listen but not do anything about it'. Several participants in FG1 told the group they had submitted requests to be put in a single room due to discrimination and lack of privacy, which were usually denied.

Additionally, reporting harassment once was not enough to warrant a response from the hotel staff. Gray described a hotel officer's reaction to his report of being sexually harassed and expressed frustration towards not being taken seriously:

I am experiencing what this person is trying to show to me, licking his lips, doing things, talking to you all the time, showing all those weird [sexual] things. I reported to the [hotel] office and they were like 'Oh maybe he's just like that, he's just kind of stupid.'

Miduna faced unique frustrations in the hotel conditions due to her gender identity; even though she informed immigration staff that she identified as a woman upon arrival in the UK, she was repeatedly placed in men's accommodation. When she reported her roommate's discriminatory attitude, she recalled that the Serco staff answered: 'the guy is a very good guy. You stay with him.' Miduna explained how she felt about the hotel staff: 'They give more importance to other people, not LGBT people.' It was only after she called Migrant Help and explained her situation that she was given a single room.

Miduna's case was not isolated: solutions offered up by the staff were often reactive and only offered when participants were already in situations of high risk. Cristina and Gray explained that their concerns were only addressed after they had been harassed by other hotel residents. Despite expressing anger towards not being provided preventative

support, they both spoke positively about hotel staff members who had helped them.

All interviewees, particularly those living in Serco Housing or with friends, highlighted that the institutions responsible for caring for people seeking asylum in Coventry often did not help them. Cristina explained that when her financial support suddenly froze, she called Migrant Help for five days in a row and they told her to file a complaint: 'I'm telling you I haven't eaten for days, [...] and you're telling me to file a complaint that's gonna take three weeks for them to do- to take action for it!' she recalled loudly and angrily.

Similar experiences occurred when participants interacted with the CRMC. Gabriel and Cristina referred to the organisation to access a solicitor. Gabriel recalls the answer he got: 'solicitors are saying that your case is too hard, so they can't handle'. Cristina also stated that '[the charity worker] said something about the Home Office calling him [solicitor] and they can no longer take on cases like that'. Gabriel explained that 'sometimes I feel like maybe because of my sexual orientation, that's why they don't want to help me'. These experiences illustrate a dominant pattern of inaction, which participants often saw as a form of discrimination.

Another primary source of feeling discriminated against was the participants' asylum interviews, which included interpreters using offensive language and interviewers disbelieving interviewees' statements about their SOGIs. Samira explained that interpreters often did not know appropriate LGBTQI+ terminology and would call them 'sissies'. Cristina stated that when she went to her screening interview, she was taken to a private room by an immigration officer, who asked her questions about her arrival in the UK and then proceeded to scream at her: 'This how you people come here and you're lying,' she recalled being told. She told FG2 that this was an experience of racism. 'When you are from Africa, when you are Black [...] they always think we are lying,' said Magnus, who also stated this disbelief was a racist approach to LGBTQI+ asylum seekers.

Gabriel, Cristina and Blaine, who were all forced to live with friends at some time in their asylum processes, stated that this was caused by a lack of response from charities and the Home Office. 'I once reach out to them and it took them too long to respond to my request, so I got a friend who help me get a place to stay,' explained Blaine. Gabriel highlighted that living with friends created a vacuum in his information sources, since he

had no direct contact with any Serco officers that he would otherwise ask questions to.

Staff inaction led participants to feel as though they were asking for too much or causing trouble. When Gray's reports of harassment in the hotel were not being addressed, he said that he 'didn't want to be the one guy who keeps reporting people about his sexuality'. 'They were not really doing enough about it, then I might just keep quiet and suffer,' he said. Sacha added that 'the more you keep complaining about people, they start to think you're the problem', a statement which all the participants of FG1 proceeded to agree with. Sentiments of embarrassment and frustration towards constantly being required to beg for their basic needs were expressed by Gabriel and Cristina.

Participants had mixed feelings about the UK and the British asylum system. Three participants noted that they felt safe within the LGBTQI+ community in the UK. Cristina and Gabriel, on the other hand, stated that the only positive factor about the UK was that they were no longer being persecuted. Gabriel described the British asylum system: 'Everything is acting, it's like they're [immigration staff] acting in a movie.' '[The Home Office] play with our lives,' he added exasperatedly.

The sentiments that the British asylum system was unjust and pervaded by discrimination and staff inaction dominated the discussion in the focus groups and interviews. Staff inaction was a significant barrier to gaining access to support from solicitors, healthcare workers and Serco staff. Inaction was often interpreted as racism or homophobia, which exacerbated participants' hesitation to approach them when they required support.

Discussion

The abuse, harassment and discrimination experienced by LGBTQI+ people in Coventry's asylum accommodation were in line with descriptions by news outlets and the Women and Equalities Parliamentary Committee (2023), and shared similarities with those found in the literature on British immigration detention (Harvey, 2023; Lewis, 2021; Stonewall and UKLGIG, 2016; UKLGIG, 2018). This and the subsequent pressures to conceal their SOGI were particularly experienced by participants living in hotels, since they were constantly surrounded by people who might pose a threat to them.

The fear of revealing their SOGI was aggravated by inaction from MH, the CRMC and Serco staff, whom participants were dependent on for information. This dependence was potentially aggravated by their difficulties obtaining solicitors and their isolation from friends and family, information sources within the asylum system described as central by Oduntan and Ruthven's (2020). Despite MH, the CRMC and Serco being sought out as the main sources of information, they often behaved inactively, which created barriers to accessing information and was interpreted as homophobia and racism by participants. This inaction particularly impacted residents living in Serco Housing, who had less direct contact with immigration staff. Although it is unclear whether lack of preparedness and/or homophobic and racist beliefs were the drivers of staff inaction, this environment saturated by feelings of hopelessness, mistrust and fear suggests that there is a systemic marginalisation of LGBTQI+ people seeking asylum in the UK. This mistrust might in turn lead staff to be uninformed and unaware of the scale of the barriers imposed onto LGBTQI+ people in the asylum system, potentially reducing the chances of structures/processes to protect them being put into place.

Experiences of obtaining support were dependent on occasional moments of staff going out of their way to help participants, who were often already at risk of violence or homelessness when said assistance was offered. Moments of risk were often linked to participants revealing or having their SOGI revealed. This created a paradoxical dynamic in which participants would suffer less harassment and discrimination if they concealed their SOGI, and yet they could only access the support they required if they did the opposite. Findings are therefore not aligned with Oduntan and Ruthven's (2019) 'survival of the informed', instead simultaneously indicating a 'survival of the hidden' with regards to maintaining one's physical safety, and a 'survival of the seen' with regards to obtaining support and avoiding one's claim being rejected.

The consequence of living in this environment was a vicious cycle of victimisation, isolation and lack of support, which, in addition to indicating a system unprepared to receive LGBTQI+ people, could be evidence of the victim-blaming-centred structure of the asylum system. Although the UK portrays itself as a protector of LGBTQI+ people (Heimer, 2019), the findings of this research indicate that this protection is often not available and occasionally withheld from them, putting the British asylum system in a dual position of protector and aggressor.

The structural lack of information coupled with continuous violence and threat faced by LGBTQI+ people is indicative of the homonationalist and dehumanising structures of the British asylum system. Participants expressed strong feelings of disappointment towards, and sometimes betrayal by, the British Home Office. Although they initially believed that claiming asylum in the UK would protect them, this was not reflected in their practical experiences. This aligns with Heimer's (2019) argument that British LGBTQI+ rights advancements have not been incorporated into the asylum system and are used as a homonationalist strategy to appear progressive. The brutality of asylum accommodation and lack of access to information and support created a hostile environment; although the UK might embrace some of the LGBTQI+ community, research findings indicate that LGBTQI+ asylum seekers are not welcome.

To address the obstacles faced by LGBTQI+ people living in Coventry's immigration accommodation, they should be provided with unique accommodation arrangements, provisionally through single rooms in the hotels and in the medium-term through giving asylum seekers the option to stay in an LGBTQI+-only housing. LGBTQI+ people would also benefit from having an officer specialised in their needs, as well as making LGBTQI+ training mandatory for all Serco staff. Above all, the British asylum system requires systemic changes that put an end to the homonationalist structures that currently pervade it. This would require further research, especially with asylum seekers who do not have SOGI-based asylum claims and with immigration staff, to understand their perspectives.

The findings of this research are limited due to the convenience sampling technique which was employed and the limited number of research participants. Most interviewees had SOGI-based asylum claims, which may imply they must be more open about their SOGI to obtain specialised information and support, potentially making them more vulnerable to harassment and violence. Additionally, only four participants did not speak English fluently and, given Bronstein's (2017) findings of language as a central barrier to obtaining information in the asylum system, this group might over-represent those who have facilitated access to information.

Conclusion

The vicious cycle of violence and fear of revealing their sexual orientations and/or gender identities is central to LGBTQI+ people's lack of access to

information in Coventry's immigration accommodation. The discrimination, harassment and abuse that participants endured inside the asylum community, coupled with staff inaction, demonstrate a systemic lack of preparedness to accommodate this population in Coventry. This is an indication of the existence of homonationalist tendencies within the UK, whereby the British asylum system does not deliver on its promises to protect LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and retains them in a state of constant fear. The provision of Serco Housing specifically designated towards LGBTQI+ people seeking asylum is necessary to alleviate their immediate needs.

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Glossary

Asylum seeker: A person who is in the process of applying for refugee status in a specific country. This application can be made on several grounds, including political persecution, religious persecution and persecution due to sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Convenience sampling: A non-probability method that involves sampling research participants who are most accessible to the researcher (Stratton, 2021). In this research project, participants self-selected if they wanted to participate. This method is often used with research participants of vulnerable communities because it allows for the establishment of trust between participants and the researcher.

Illegal Migration Act 2023: Act that determined that anyone arriving in the UK through irregular routes, such as small boat crossings, would not be able to claim asylum, regardless of their protection needs (Illegal Migration Act 2023). Many organisations, such as Freedom from Torture, have argued that this act breaches international law, since it pulled back on commitments such as not sending people to countries where they could

be at risk of persecution (Freedom from Torture, 2023).

Immigration accommodation: Lodgings provided to asylum seekers by the Home Office while they are in the process of trying to obtain their refugee statuses.

Immigration detention centres: Detention centres specifically dedicated to asylum seekers, who can be detained at any stage of their claim. Asylum seekers are often detained upon arrival in the UK and also in the case that they are imminently to be deported from the country.

LGBTQI+: Umbrella term that describes people who experience sexual orientations and/or gender identities that are not heteronormative. This term was used throughout this research paper because it was the preferred terminology employed by research participants.

Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013: Act that extended the right to marriage to LGBTQI+ couples in England and Wales (Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013)

Nationality and Borders Act 2022: Act that split asylum seekers into two groups: admissible and inadmissible. An asylum seeker is considered inadmissible when they (1) arrive in the UK through irregular routes, (2) travel through a 'safe third country' before arriving in the UK, or (3) are from an EU country. An inadmissible asylum seeker can be removed to a country considered 'safe' by the British government (Nationality and Borders Act 2022). One example of how this act was taken advantage of was the Safety of Rwanda Act of 2024, an agreement between the British and Rwandan governments which planned on removing inadmissible asylum seekers to Rwanda (Safety of Rwanda Act 2024).

Refugee: A person who has applied for and subsequently been granted leave to remain in a specific country, gaining refugee status.

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