

9. ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REGISTRATION HOLDERS

Lhbtqi+ refugees who apply for asylum in the Netherlands due to their sexual orientation and gender diversity often face difficulties. They are not always accepted within reception facilities. They are often far removed from society, where social isolation and loneliness are a threat.

Support and a safe environment are crucial. It is strongly recommended that separate, small-scale reception facilities be established for this small and often vulnerable group.

Sufficient attention must be paid to this group, and unsafe situations must be prevented. If crimes targeting lhbtqi+ refugees occur at a reception center in Zaanstad, the perpetrators must be dealt with and immediately removed from the reception center.~

What has been achieved

Easy contact for lhbtqi+ refugees

Upon arrival at a shelter in Zaanstad, all residents receive a folder with information. This includes an lhbtqi+ flyer with a QR code containing the phone number of a COA contact person, providing an easy way for LGBTQA+ refugees to get in touch. A group app for lhbtqi+ shelter residents allows them to communicate with each other. Activities organized by De Zaanse Regenboog (the Zaanse Regenboog) are also shared here.

It is crucial for lhbtqi+ refugees to meet with a group of like-minded people, preferably outside the shelter, so they can be themselves, safely, and freely. This is also evident in the following quote from an lhbtqi+ asylum seeker from Zaanstad: “We are very happy to be in the Zaanse Regenboog Family. Yesterday represented our freedom. We are grateful to you for supporting us without discrimination and with love and smiling faces”.

Psychological support

There is a significant need for psychological support among refugees. This also applies to lhbtqi+ refugees, where the inability to accept oneself and connect with others can also play a role. The Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) is in contact with the Choices Support Center, an organization that offers prevention and psychological support for lhbtqi+ refugees. They have a call center where residents can ask their questions, in multiple languages. It would be wonderful if this leads to a successful collaboration.

Recommendations

Shelter for lhbtqi+ asylum seekers

Making current (mixed) shelters safer for this target group is a top priority. Sufficient attention must be paid to this group, and unsafe situations must be prevented. If crimes targeting lhbtqi+ refugees occur at a shelter in Zaanstad, the perpetrators must be dealt with and immediately removed from the shelter.

Precisely because shelters and asylum centers can be unsafe for lhbtqi+ asylum seekers and refugees, it is crucial that small-scale shelters are organized for this group. In its ProtectUs* report,

LGBT Asylum Support highlights the serious risks of mixed-gender shelters and the need for shelter specifically for this group.

- In 2025, the municipality of Zaanstad will investigate the possibilities of opening a small-scale shelter specifically for LGBTQ+ asylum seekers.

Strengthening the network of asylum seekers and refugees

Lhbtqi+ refugees often find themselves socially isolated due to their limited network. They are newly settled in Zaanstad and have not yet established contacts. Therefore, it is crucial that good contact is established and maintained between the COA (Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers), the municipality of Zaanstad, and lhbtqi+ advocacy organizations.

- It is important that the COA continues to raise awareness of the existence of lhbtqi+ organizations and their activities among the lhbtqi+ target group.
- In addition, organizing language courses at the shelters is essential. The language barrier makes it more difficult to connect with Zaan residents.
- De Zaanse Regenboog and other social organizations are recruiting buddies for this target group.

Psychological Support

Lhbtqi+ refugees are more likely than average to experience more serious psychological issues, such as depression, anxiety, stress, and mistrust. They require professional support for these issues. Unfortunately, waiting lists for psychological care can last many months.

Waiting times of eight months or longer are not uncommon, for example, for psychological support for lhbtqi+ refugees and for i-psy (intercultural psychiatry).

- It is in the best interest of these refugees that the municipality takes action to reduce these waiting lists and ensure that adequate help is provided more quickly.
- The municipality urges the COA (Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) to establish support groups for psychological support within the shelters, where residents can access support in an accessible manner.

Special Assistance

It is recommended that the existing special assistance policy include a section for name and gender changes. This prevents each individual gender-dysphoric asylum seeker from having to fight this. The cost of name and gender changes is approximately €350. This amount includes the fees for the new residence permit, a certificate of expertise for gender change, and the various translation costs of the necessary documents.

*<https://lgbtasylumsupport.nl/nl/protectus-nl/>